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THE MIRACLES:

HELPS TO FAITH, NOT HINDRANCES.

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THE MIRACLES:

HELPS TO FAITH, NOT HINDRANCES.

BY

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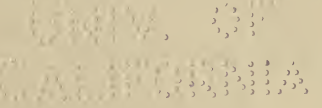

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OF

AFFECTION, GRATITUDE, AND ADMIRATION.

W. M. TAYLOR.

Bootle, Liverpool,
Sept. 11, 1865.

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'If I do not the works of my Father, believe me not. But if I do, though ye believe not me, believe the works; that ye may know and believe that the Father is in me, and I in him.'

THE LORD JESUS, JOHN x. 37, 38.

'Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles, and wonders, and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know.'

PETER, ON THE DAY OF PENTECOST,
ACTS ii. 22.

'How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him; God also bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to his own will?'

EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS ii. 3, 4.

INTRODUCTION.

An investigation of the various questions connected with miracles, and the place which they occupy as evidences for the divine origin and authority of the Christian religion, can scarcely ever be unseasonable; for every time the gospel has been assailed, from the days of Julian downwards, these supernatural facts have been the first to be attacked. But while the substance of the objections has remained the same, the form in which they have been expressed has been altered to suit the circumstances of the hour. This variation in the mode of attack has necessitated a corresponding change in the method of defence; just as the building of iron ships of war by other nations has caused the reconstruction of the British Navy. Each new assailant gives a new phase to some old and long-answered

objection, and so requires to be met and repelled from a new position. Hence the recent appearance of certain well-known works containing many specious objections, which are apt to impose on those who have not thought round the subject, has seemed to warrant the attempt to give a short and comprehensive treatment of such important subjects, as the nature, possibility, credibility, and evidential value of miracles.

This is all the more needed, because there is in many minds the idea that the miracles are very unimportant things, and that it makes little matter, so far as our belief in the gospel is concerned, whether they be accepted or rejected; while there are others who, though they receive the miracles, do so as a part of their religion, and far from regarding them as evidences for the truth of the gospel, feel that they could have accepted it more readily if it had contained no records of the supernatural at all. Along with this depreciation of the miraculous, it is right to state that there is in many cases a profound acknowledgment of the value of what is called experimental evidence; but still we cannot but

think that there is danger to the interests of truth and godliness in such a low estimate of the value of the supernatural. For if we view the mission of Christ as a whole, what is it but one stupendous miracle? What is the incarnation if it be not a miracle? What is the great redemptive scheme but an interference or intervention of Divine agency to produce an effect otherwise impossible? and is not that the very essence of miracle? If, therefore, we let go or fail to appreciate those miracles, which, lying in the sphere of human observation, were given as the external signs of the reality of that great spiritual miracle which cannot be so directly tested, who does not see that by and by we shall be in danger of letting go this last also? If we reject miracle in the material department, are we not on the high way that leads to the rejection of it in the spiritual, and so to the reduction of the gospel to a mere system of naturalism, one among the rest of the religions of the world,—better than most indeed, but still only of men?

We do not seek to depreciate experimental evidence, but what we wish to be remembered is,

that there must be Christian experience in the soul before the force of that evidence can be felt; and to have Christian experience there must be faith in Christ; and to have a rational faith in him there must be evidence of his divine commission of some external sort presented to and received by the mind. It is all very well to say with Coleridge, 'Evidences of Christianity! I am weary of the word: make a man feel the want of it, and it may safely be left to its own evidences;' but even when he does feel the want of it, the question faces him, On what ground am I to believe that this religion is from heaven? And for answer you cannot refer him to his own experience, for he has no Christian experience yet, and can have none until he have received Jesus as the Divine Redeemer; neither will he be satisfied with your experience, though even that would be external evidence to him. He wants some direct proof that this gospel is from God; and so far as we can see, there is no such proof which you can give him but that of miracles.

No doubt when you refer him to them, he will be for a time beset with the difficulties which a

sceptical philosophy has raised regarding them; and perhaps the very fact that some perplexity has been felt in proving the miracles themselves, has disposed many to disregard them as evidences of the gospel. But we must remember, that however hard we have found it to demonstrate a proposition, we do not scruple after it has been demonstrated to use it in the elucidation of another; or as Whately[1] has put it, 'The difficulty of proving any fact, does not make that fact when proved a less convincing proof of something else.' Hence if we see good grounds for believing in the miracles as historical facts, then, though in arriving at that conclusion we may have had to wrestle with objections of all sorts, yet, having arrived at it, we should not be deterred from using it in seeking to establish the divinity of the gospel.

In the following essay we have attempted to unfold in a clear, condensed, comprehensive, and we hope also conclusive manner, the argument in proof of miracles, and then to state the argument from miracles in proof of the gospel. We have not consciously evaded any difficulty or overstated

[1] *Introductory Lessons on Christian Evidences*, p. 41.

any proof; we have tried to reason calmly and solemnly, as befits the momentous character of the subject; and we cherish the hope that our words may be useful in confirming the faith of those who have already received the gospel, and removing difficulties which others may feel obstructing their belief.

In dealing with questions which have been so frequently discussed, we claim the merits of clearness and condensation rather than that of originality. We have carefully consulted all the works bearing on the subject on which we could lay our hands, and we have not scrupled to quote the words of others when they give clear expression to the thought which we wished to convey. In every such instance, however, we have honestly given to every man his own, and mentioned the author to whom we are indebted. Our aim has been to produce a tractate which may serve as an introduction to the study of this interesting subject for those who wish to prosecute it, while it may suffice as a summary compendium for those who have not the opportunity to go further.

We have written specially for the benefit of

young men, whose minds are awaking to thought on the great theological subjects of the day. To all such we say, 'Come, and let us reason together;' and if by the blessing of God we shall be the means of enabling some to escape the sophistries of modern scepticism, or furnishing others with the material for giving a reason for the hope that is in them, we shall be abundantly rewarded.

I.

STATEMENT OF THE QUESTION.

In entering upon our subject, it is necessary to observe the place which an inquiry into the miracles holds in the order of an investigation into the evidences of Christianity. It is often alleged that the defenders of the faith are guilty of reasoning in a circle, inasmuch as they hold that the miracles are proved by the inspiration and authority of Scripture, while they employ the miracles to establish the divinity of the Bible; but a little reflection will be sufficient to convince any one that this is a mistake. For, taking up these ancient books as we would do common productions, we first ask concerning them, When were they written? Were they written by the persons whose names they bear? Have they come to us just as they were when they proceeded from their authors' hands? Then, having these ques-

tions answered to our satisfaction, we go on to inquire whether the books are credible records of actual occurrences; and it is in the settlement of this point that the miracles first present themselves for consideration. Thereafter, supposing we come to the conclusion that the miracles, so far from destroying the trustworthiness of these writings, were themselves really performed, there comes this other inquiry, What do these supernatural works say regarding the person and mission of him by whom they were performed? In other words, when we are treating of the *credibility* of the gospel history, we have to answer the question, how far that is affected by the records of supernatural occurrences which it contains; and then, the credibility established, in dealing with the *divine authority* of the gospel, we have to ask what the miracles say concerning him who wrought them, and the system in connection with which they were performed. There is thus no vicious circle, but a strictly logical and exact method is pursued, each subject of investigation following naturally on that by which it is preceded.

Of course it will not be expected that we should, in an essay like this, go back upon all the matters which we have mentioned. We must be allowed to assume, as already proved, that the Gospels were written before the close of the first century,[1] that they are the productions of the men whose names they bear, and that they are in our hands substantially as they were when written at the first. We stand at the investigation into their credibility, and here we find miracles to be the stumblingblock of many. They are, in a sense, as Bushnell has said, 'a heavy burden resting on the credibility of the gospel;'[2] and Renan, with the most quiet *nonchalance*, lays down authoritatively this dictum, 'That the Gospels are in part legendary is evident, since they are full of miracles and of the supernatural.'[3] Here, therefore, we are

[1] Even Renan admits this. Speaking of the first period into which he would divide the history of the origin of Christianity, he says, 'I would close this about the year 100, at the time when the last friends of Jesus were dead, and *when all the books of the New Testament were almost fixed in the forms in which we now read them.*' How to reconcile this admission with his treatment of these documents baffles our comprehension; nevertheless the admission, as coming from him, is not without its value, as showing that the theory of Strauss, with its late origin of the Gospels, is by him regarded as untenable.

[2] *Nature and the Supernatural*, p. 259.

[3] *Life of Jesus*, People's Edition, p. 8.

brought face to face with the question, Were these miracles actual occurrences, or does the fact that the gospel contains an account of such things vitiate its credibility, and give to it a legendary character? To the consideration of this most important matter we devote the following pages, as a contribution, however humble, to the defence of that truth which in these last days has been so wantonly assailed.

II.

DEFINITION OF A MIRACLE.

And first let us try to obtain a correct idea of what a miracle is. In the New Testament four words are employed to designate these supernatural occurrences,—namely, miracles, wonders, signs, and works. The first (*δυνάμεις*) signifies powers, and refers to the agency by which they were produced; the second (*τέρατα*) denotes marvels, and alludes to their effect on the mind of the beholder; the third (*σημεία*), signs, has special reference to their significance in connection with the system by whose inauguration they were wrought; while the last (*ἔργα*), works, is only used regarding them by Jesus himself, and this mode of speech in his lips is most suggestive, as implying that the things which to others were so marvellous, were in his case perfectly natural, being in fact only the outcome and development

of his true divinity. Various definitions of a miracle have been proposed by theologians;[1] it will be sufficient for our purpose, however, if we arrange them into two classes. We take Timothy Dwight as representing the one, and Dr Robert Vaughan as illustrating the other. According to the former,[2] 'A miracle is a suspension or counteraction of what are called the laws of nature. By the laws of nature I intend those regular courses of divine agency we discern in the world around us.' Vaughan says,[3] 'By a miracle we do not understand even a suspension, much less a violation, of natural laws, but simply such a control of natural causes as bespeaks an intervention of the cause to which they are all subordinate.' Between the advocates of those two definitions great discussions have been maintained, and it has been supposed that the latter takes away the ground of some of the most acute objections which infidels have brought against the miracles them-

[1] A most full and comprehensive classification of the definitions which have been given of a miracle will be found in the Appendix to *Christ and Christianity*, by Dr Lindsay Alexander, pp. 303–312.

[2] Dwight's *Theology*, Sermon 60.

[3] Vaughan's *Age and Christianity*, p. 82, Second Edition.

selves; but to our view, the whole dispute seems little better than one about words, both parties meaning substantially the same thing, and only appearing to be opposed because the one look mainly at the effect produced, and the other confine their attention to the cause producing it. Dwight, and those who agree with him, would at once admit—nay, they would strenuously contend—that the suspension or counteraction of natural law was produced by the power of God; while Vaughan, and those of whom we have used him as the representative, would also willingly concede that the intervention of the Great First Cause does hold in check or counteract, or, to use Vaughan's own word, 'control' the operation of natural causes. Hence, without at all entering into the debate which has been held over the definition of a miracle, we may in general terms describe it, with Dr W. L. Alexander, as being[1] 'a sensible effect produced by the immediate power of God;' and if it be asked how we know when such events occur, we may supplement the description with the words of Dr Wardlaw, and answer, because

[1] *Christ and Christianity*, pp. 213–214.

'they involve a temporary suspension of the known laws of nature, or a deviation from the established constitution and fixed order of the universe.'[1] Observe that word '*known*,' for it is important, inasmuch as a miracle does not appeal to our ignorance, but to our knowledge. It is not simply an event which we cannot explain, but it is something which we see and know to be inconsistent with certain laws of nature. When Columbus threatened to bring darkness upon the Indians if they would not comply with his demands, and the darkness came, there was no miracle, save to the ignorance of the savages, for he simply predicted an eclipse; but when a dead man, in whose body decomposition is begun, is recalled to life, we know there must be miracle, for the natural law in that case is that corruption should increase. It has been well said by an acute author on this subject:[2]

[1] *On Miracles*, by Ralph Wardlaw, D.D., p. 24. Perhaps, for precision and brevity, there is no definition better than that of Mr Bayne in his most admirable little book, *The Testimony of Christ to Christianity*, p. 26: 'A miracle is an occasional display of divine power, independently of those sequences of natural laws through which God commonly acts.'

[2] *The Miracles of Scripture defended from the Assaults of Modern Scepticism.* The Introductory Lecture at the opening of the United

'Miracles presuppose a knowledge, accurate so far as it goes, of the laws of the material world, and their essence lies in being a manifest departure from them. Even a real miracle would be no miracle to us, it would not even seem a prodigy, if we were quite ignorant of the ordinary laws to which it stood in opposition.' But in order to prevent all misapprehension, let us distinctly note here what we mean by 'nature' and 'laws of nature.' 'Nature' is the system of things which God has established in the material world; and 'laws of nature' are the observed modes in which, according to his arrangement, material substances operate on and in relation to each other. These laws are the generalizations of the mind itself, and have been inferred by us by a process of induction.[1]

Presbyterian Theological Hall, August 1850. By William Lindsay, D.D. P. 7.

[1] 'The laws of nature are nothing else than the common operations of divine power in the government of the world, which depend entirely for their existence and continuance on the divine will, and a miracle is nothing else than the exertion of the same power in a way different from that which is common; or it may be a mere suspension of that power which is commonly observed to operate in the world.'—*The Evidences of Christianity*, by Dr Archibald Alexander, pp. 38, 39. 'This use of the word *law*, our readers will of course perceive, has relation to us as understanding, rather than to the universe as obeying certain rules.'—Sir John Herschell,

Now in this view, whatever happens in the material world which is not in the usual sequence of cause and effect, or which, in the words of Bushnell,[1] 'acts upon the chain of cause and effect from without,' that is, in the strictest sense of the word, supernatural. In this sense, man himself has power over and above nature. Thus, so far as natural law is concerned, this book must continue to lie on the table; but when I will to lift it, and carry out my volition, I suspend or counteract for the time being the natural law which men call gravitation,—that is to say, I act upon nature from without, and above it, and, in the strict sense in which we have used the word, I do a supernatural thing. And so we might illustrate by many other instances. To borrow

Preliminary Discourse to the study of Natural Philosophy. 'What are called laws of nature, we are prone to think of as some kind of powers; and of powers, too, operating according to an uncontrolled and uncontrollable necessity. We require to be aware of this deceptive influence of terms, and to school our minds carefully into freedom from it. For what is nature? . . . the material and animal world, with the order and constitution settled for it by the power and the wisdom which gave it being. And what are laws of nature? Powers? Not at all; they are simply the rules according to which power operates; the rules prescribed by the (wisdom of the) All-wise to the might of the All-powerful.'—*Wardlaw on Miracles*, p. 52.

[1] *Nature and the Supernatural*, p. 21.

again from Bushnell, 'Nature never built a house, or modelled a ship, or fitted a coat, or invented a steam-engine, or wrote a book, or framed a constitution.'[1] Hence the human soul has power over nature, and can up to a certain extent control, suspend, or counteract its laws. Up to a certain extent, for man is finite; but where he ceases to have power, God is as omnipotent as ever; and if you only carry up your thoughts from man's power over nature to God's,—if you only think of God by his will counteracting or suspending, in a given case beyond the reach of human causality, the usual course of things which men call nature, you will have the idea of a miracle. There is, however, one great difference between the two. Man controls nature in one case by obeying some other natural law, and bringing into operation some secondary cause. Thus, in the instances given above, the lifting of the book, the building of the house, etc., are all illustrations of man's intelligence availing itself of its knowledge of one set of natural laws to produce effects which, apart from his intervention, nature itself would never

[1] *Nature and the Supernatural*, p. 26.

have caused. But when God performs a supernatural work, his power is direct and immediate in its operation, and is put forth as his creating energy was at first by a simple act of will. He does not, like men, bring one set of secondary causes to act upon another; but, himself the Great First Cause, he, in the given case, produces the effect by his omnipotent volition. This radical difference between the supernatural in the only sense in which man can be said to perform it, and the supernatural as it is wrought by God, must never be lost sight of. Nevertheless, the process by which we have ascended from the intelligent creature to the Creator will be sufficient to give every one a clear idea of what we mean by miracle.

III.

POSSIBILITY OF MIRACLES.

THE view which we have just advanced is important from its bearing on the question of the possibility of miracles; for if, as has been asserted by many, they are impossible, then equally so must creation be, and we are thus driven by logical necessity to Atheism, or, what is much the same thing under another name, Pantheism. Accordingly, we find that this is the position deliberately assumed by many who deny that miracles can ever occur. The opinions of Strauss are inseparably interwoven with the philosophy of Hegel, which is pantheistic in its essence; and a writer of great power has said regarding Baden Powell, with as much truth as force, 'The completeness with which he banishes spirit-power from the universe is terrible. You must not even admit the possibility that any present fact should have a supernatural,

spiritual cause; and the "idea of creation" in the past is "rejected;" out of the far eternity, guided by no hand, rattles the chariot of the universe; into the far eternity, bearing no rider, rolls that chariot away; no God in the past, no God in the present, no God in the future; and for the Father of the generations of men, for the Spirit of light, of life, of love, the infernal mockery of "a grand foundation-conception of universal law," and some unimaginable "spirituality," which is but a term for nonentity.'[1] To refute these views, therefore, we would need to refute Atheism and Pantheism themselves, and gather up the evidences which are everywhere to be found for the existence of a personal God. Into this subject, however, we shall not enter here, inasmuch as it has been already fully and satisfactorily disposed of by many eminent writers. We shall confine ourselves simply to the consideration of the most plausible argument which has been recently set forth against the possibility of miracles.

[1] *Bayne's Testimony of Christ to Christianity*, p. 15.

I. OBJECTION BY BADEN POWELL.

It is that of Baden Powell, who has said, that 'the entire range of the inductive philosophy is at once based upon, and in every instance tends to confirm by immense accumulations of evidence, the grand truth of the universal order and constancy of natural causes as a primary law of belief, so strongly entertained and fixed in the mind of every truly inductive inquirer, that he can hardly even conceive of the possibility of its failure.'[1] Now, there are here two very grave errors. The inductive philosophy is not based upon a belief in the universal order and constancy of natural causes; rather it tends to establish that as an inference from the observations which it makes upon material substances; and the foundation on which it is built, as every one familiar with the writings of its great originator must at once admit, is this, that nothing which claims to rest on a basis of fact is to be rejected without investigation, or on purely *à priori* grounds, and that all things are to be regarded as possible

[1] *Essays and Reviews*, Eleventh Edition, pp. 129, 130.

which are not self-contradictory. Hence the true Baconian philosopher will refuse to examine nothing, however antecedently improbable it may appear, if it be brought before him as having actually occurred. To put the miracles out of court, therefore, and decline to receive their evidence on the alleged ground that all such things are impossible, is a proceeding most unphilosophical and absurd. But more than this, in the quotation which we have made, Powell attempts to add to the number of our intuitive beliefs a truth, at the certainty of which we arrive only by a long process of induction. The uniformity of nature, as any one may at once convince himself by throwing himself back on his own consciousness, is not a first truth, or primary law of belief; it is an inference from our own observation and experience, taken in connection with the testimony of others.[1] So far from its being a primary law of

[1] Long before Baden Powell wrote, the late Dr Dick had said: 'It is not *intuitively* evident, that because an event has regularly taken place in a long period, it will take place in a period equally long. . . . If the universe is governed by omnipotence, for aught that we could tell its movements might stop to-morrow, or some alteration might be made which would give it a new constitution; and the utmost which we are warranted to presume is, that if it is

belief, that there must be a universal order and constancy of natural causes, a great philosopher, who will not be suspected of any partiality to miracles, has declared that he finds no difficulty 'in conceiving that in some one, for instance, of the many firmaments into which sidereal astronomy now divides the universe, events may succeed one another at random, without any fixed law; nor can anything in our experience, or in our mental nature, constitute a sufficient, or indeed any reason for believing that this is nowhere the case.'[1] Hence there is nothing in our mental constitution—call it intuitive principle of belief, or whatever else—to prevent us from admitting the possibility of miracles.

II. PROOF OF THE POSSIBILITY OF MIRACLES FROM GEOLOGY.

But now, let us also make an appeal to the

the will of the Most High that the present race should still people the earth, the present order, which is so admirably adapted to their nature and necessities, will be upheld.'—*Lectures on Theology*, vol. i. pp. 120, 121. Even this presumption, however, it will be seen, is a deduction, not an intuition.

[1] John Stuart Mill: *Logic Inductive and Deductive*, vol. ii. p. 96.

inductive philosophy, and show not only that miracles may be, but that they have been. For this purpose we go to the great 'stone-book' of the earth, and call upon geology to give testimony in our behalf. If any of the deductions of that most interesting science may be accepted as well founded, it is that which declares that there are certain distinct and well-defined formations,—each belonging to a separate period in the history of the earth's crust, having its own kind of remains, and revealing the existence of new species, which could only have been called into being by the miracle of creation. Lest, however, we should mar the force of this argument by an imperfect statement of it, let us hear one who was well qualified to speak with authority on the subject. 'What say you,' says Hugh Miller,[1] 'to the relics that stand out in such bold relief from the rocks beside us, in *their* character as the results of miracle? The perished tribes and races which they represent all *began* to exist. There is no truth which science can more conclusively demonstrate than that they all had a beginning.

[1] *Footprints of the Creator*, 1861, pp. 266, 267.

The infidel who, in this late age of the world, would attempt to fall back upon the fiction of "an infinite series," would be laughed to scorn. They all began to be. But how? No true geologist holds by the development hypothesis. *It* has been resigned to sciolists and smatterers, and there is but one alternative. They began to be *through the miracle of creation.* From the evidence furnished by these rocks we are shut down either to the belief in miracle, or to the belief in something else, infinitely harder of reception, and as thoroughly unsupported by evidence as it is contrary to experience. Hume is at length answered by the severe truths of the stony science. He was not, according to Job, "in league with the stones of the field, and they have risen in irresistible warfare against him in the Creator's behalf."'

It may be said, however, that since Miller's lamented death the development hypothesis has been immensely forwarded by Mr Darwin, but we greatly fear that even he must be classed with those whom Miller in the above-quoted passage has called 'sciolists and smatterers;' for where

are the facts on which he proceeds? His view has been dignified with the name of a theory; but to call it by that appellation is more than it deserves. A theory is a general principle which is tentatively put forth as the explanation of certain well-accredited facts; but where are the facts here? Has the vaunted naturalist produced a single instance in which a change of species has occurred, requiring some such hypothesis as that of natural selection for its explanation? Has he found any remains which may verify his view by showing us the different steps by which in any given case the transition was accomplished? Or is it not rather the case that, in utter defiance of the Newtonian maxim, 'Hypotheses non fingo,' he has been feigning hypotheses, and that the whole thing is an 'ingenious fancy'? Does he not require to help out his view with a whole host of suppositions, such as that some geologic strata are entirely lost? and is it not true that he bases his argument on simple possibilities, and not on actual facts? If all this were done by a theologian, men would cry out against its unphilosophical character, and talk about the first principles of

the inductive system; but what must be said of it as the logic of a naturalist? We are not surprised that a reviewer has declared that Mr Darwin's book 'exhibits philosophical abilities of the lowest order,'[1] and we shall need something stronger than hypothesis before we give up the already well-ascertained deductions of geology as announced by Hugh Miller in the paragraph which we have quoted.

We hold, then, science itself being witness, that miracles have been; and this is the best answer that can be given to those who proclaim them to be impossible. If on the leaves of the book of nature we see that there have been repeated breakings in upon its uniformity by new creating acts, on what principle shall we refuse to believe that similar occurrences can take place when we read of them in the book of revelation? That

[1] *British Quarterly Review* for January 1865, p. 143, note. For a masterly note on the logic of Mr Darwin from the recent work of Dr W. L. Alexander, *St Paul at Athens*, see Appendix A. After reading that exposure of fallacious reasoning, there will be few who will allow themselves to be carried away with the development novelty, and every one will feel the force of the warning, 'Let us distinguish between what science can prove, and what men of science can ingeniously fancy and ably expound.'

which hath been may be; it cannot therefore be said that those who would bar our very investigation of miracles by alleging that no such things can be, have made good their case: rather, we have shown that the position they have assumed is both unphilosophical and unscientific.

IV.

CREDIBILITY OF MIRACLES.

I. ARGUMENT OF HUME.

And now, having disposed of this class of objectors, we are immediately encountered by another, who declare that no proof can establish the occurrence of a miracle; and at their head is David Hume, with the argument of his famous Essay. The words of that well-known sceptic are the following: 'Experience is our only guide in reasoning concerning matters of fact.'[1] Experience is in some things variable, in some things uniform. A variable experience gives rise only to a probability; a uniform experience amounts to a proof. 'Probability always supposes an opposition of experiments and observations, where the one side is found to overbalance the other, and to produce a degree of evidence proportioned

[1] Hume's *Essays*, 1809, vol. ii. p. 116.

to the superiority.'[1] In such cases 'we must balance the opposite experiments, and deduct the lesser number from the greater, in order to know the exact force of the superior evidence.'[2] 'Our belief or assurance of any fact from the report of eye-witnesses, is derived from no other principle than our observation of the veracity of human testimony, and of the usual conformity of facts to the report of witnesses.'[3] Now, if 'the fact attested partakes of the marvellous, if it is such as has seldom fallen under our observation, here is a contest of two opposite experiences, of which the one destroys the other, as far as its force goes, and the superior can only operate on the mind by the force which remains. The very same principle of experience, which gives us a certain degree of assurance in the testimony of witnesses, gives us also in this case another degree of assurance against the fact which they endeavour to establish, from which contradiction there necessarily arises a counterpoise, and mutual destruction of belief and authority.'[4] Further, 'if the

[1] Hume's *Essays*, 1809, vol. ii. p. 117.
[2] *Ibid.* p. 117.
[3] *Ibid.* pp. 117, 118.
[4] *Ibid.* p. 120.

fact affirmed by the witnesses, instead of being only marvellous, is really miraculous; if, besides, the testimony considered apart and in itself amounts to an entire proof,—in that case there is proof against proof, of which the strongest must prevail, but still with a diminution of its force, in proportion to that of its antagonist. A miracle is a violation of the laws of nature; and as a firm and unalterable experience has established these laws, the proof against a miracle, from the very nature of the fact, is as entire as any argument from experience can possibly be imagined.'[1] And if so, it is an undeniable consequence that 'no testimony is sufficient to establish a miracle unless the testimony be of such a kind, that its falsehood would be more miraculous than the fact which it would endeavour to establish; and even in that case there is a mutual destruction of arguments, and the superior only gives us an assurance suitable to that degree of force which remains after deducting the inferior.'[2] Such, in substance, is the objection of David Hume; and the more we look at it the more shall we be struck

[1] Hume's *Essays*, 1809, vol. ii. p. 120. [2] *Ibid.* p. 121.

by its specious and plausible character. Its danger lies principally in the fact, that there is a sense in which his premises are correct, while yet they do not warrant the conclusion which he draws. His argument is one half true, and therefore it is more insidious than if it were wholly false—

'For a lie which is half a truth is ever the blackest of lies;
A lie which is all a lie may be met and fought with outright,
But a lie which is part a truth is a harder matter to fight.'[1]

We do not care to deny that experience has established the general uniformity of nature's laws; for if this were not the case, a miracle would not be in any way striking or impressive, as a variation from them. Neither do we feel called upon to dispute that our belief in the testimony of eye-witnesses rests upon our observation of the veracity of human testimony; and that, in the case of a miracle, the proof furnished by eye-witnesses must be set against the proof for the uniformity of nature's laws, *as far as regards that particular occurrence*, and the conclusion pronounced in favour of that which preponderates. That is precisely the principle on which we go in our

[1] Tennyson.

investigation of miracles; and the position we take up is this, that the testimony of those who give evidence for the miracles of the New Testament is such as not only to counterpoise, but in this instance to outweigh, that which is given by experience in behalf of the uniformity of nature's laws. Thus, on Hume's own principle as laid down in the earlier portion of our extracts, he ought at once to have gone on to investigate the nature of the testimony borne to miracles, and to see if that did not warrant the belief in their reality, in spite of the experience we have of nature's uniformity. Indeed, he has himself said in another passage:—'When any one tells me that he saw a dead man restored to life, I immediately consider with myself whether it be more probable that this person should either deceive or be deceived, or that the fact which he relates should really have happened. I weigh the one miracle against the other, and according to the superiority which I discover, I pronounce the decision, and always reject the greater miracle. If the falsehood of his testimony would be more miraculous than the event which he relates, then,

and not till then, can he pretend to demand my belief or opinion.'[1] But this, as every one must observe, is precisely what the Christian apologist requires; only, in estimating the value of evidence, he does not look simply to the number of proofs, but has regard to the character and quality as well. Not the quantity only, but the weight of that which we put into the scale, determines how much will be required to turn the beam; and looking to the worth of the witnesses, the Christian asserts that the falsehood of such testimony as is given to the miracles of Christ would be a greater miracle than any which the Scriptures ask us to believe. We would have expected, after such an assertion as that given above, that Hume would have proceeded, as he phrases it, to weigh the one miracle against the other, and see which really preponderates; but this is precisely what he has nowhere attempted. He has indeed introduced some of the so-called miracles of the Roman Catholic records, such as that a man was said to have recovered the power of walking by having his leg rubbed with holy oil, and that many indi-

[1] *Essays*, as before, pp. 121, 122.

viduals alleged that they were healed by touching the tomb of Abbé Paris, and of course he concludes against them; but simply because he finds these false, he rejects those of Christ without deeming them worthy of a moment's examination. Yet it is not the alleged miracles of the Middle Ages which are on their trial; it was not to undermine them that the famous Essay was written. The whole drift and purpose of the author was to destroy the credibility of the miracles of Christ. Why, then, has he not examined them? Is there any ground for doubting the reality of Christ's supernatural works, in the fact that false pretensions have been put forth for Abbé Paris? Am I to be held dishonest, because others have been proved to be so? We do not want to see his principle tested on the wonders wrought at the grave of the Abbé Paris; we want to see it applied to the miracles of Christ. Instead of this, however, he forecloses the whole matter by a very adroit, and one is almost constrained to add most perverse and dishonest, begging of the question. This is accomplished by a skilful manœuvring with the terms 'experience,'

and 'testimony,' and by the quiet insertion of one unchallenged word in his argument. Let us expose the fallacy. What does he mean by experience, when he says 'it has established the uniformity of nature's laws'? If he mean by it his own individual experience, then no objection can be taken to his assertion; but if he mean by it the experience of men in all ages of the world, then that is taking for granted the thing to be proved, for the very point in dispute is whether the 'experience' of the men in the Saviour's days, who declared that they saw his miracles, be not in favour of such supernatural occurrences. This sophism becomes more conspicuous when we look at the word 'unalterable,' which he has prefixed to experience, when he alleges that it establishes the laws of nature; for if that experience is unalterable there is an end of the matter, the subject is foreclosed, and we are sent back to the denial of the possibility of miracles which we have already exposed. Observe, therefore, 'how he palters with the double sense.' His own experience has nothing to do with the case, as no one alleges that he saw the miracles of the Lord

Jesus; but using that term in that meaning in the premises, he dexterously injects the wider sense into it in the conclusion, and his argument is thus fallacious and confusing. It amounts to this, that because a great mass of mankind have not experienced miracles, therefore we are to disbelieve the testimony of that portion of the race who declare in the most credible manner that they have seen them; an argument this as ridiculous as the defence of the Irishman, who, on being confronted with a man who said he saw him steal, answered, 'Well, what of that? I could get a hundred men to say they didn't!' There is not a jury in the land, we may be sure, who in a judicial case would allow themselves to be imposed upon with such a transparent sophism.

But this is not all. There is in this skilful piece of sophistry a comparison of experience with testimony, and an exaltation of the former over the latter, as if they were radically distinct. Here again, however, let us ask of whose experience he speaks? If it be our own individual experience, then very clearly that which comes under a person's own observation makes a more

forcible impression on him than that which he hears from the testimony of another; but the question recurs, What has my personal experience to do here? If I had been present and observed something different from those who were spectators at the time, then my experience might be put against theirs. But if it be the general experience of mankind of which he speaks, then how do we get to know what that is but by the very testimony which it is Hume's object to depreciate? Hence, to put the general experience of mankind against testimony, is only after all to compare testimony with testimony; and therefore this famous argument, where it is not a begging of the question, simply throws us back upon the study of the evidence which has been given in support of miracles, and asks us to determine whether it be of such a kind as not only to warrant our belief in their reality, but also to render culpable our unbelief.[1]

But besides this, to exalt experience against

[1] Admirably has Mr Bayne said, 'I believe that the word of one true man is surer evidence than the experience of nature's uniformity for a thousand years, and that the spiritual philosophy which accords this supremacy to the deliberate accents of reason

testimony, so as to make the fact that an event has never before occurred, a reason for believing that it can never happen, would be in the highest degree absurd, and would put an end at once to history and science; for what says Bishop Butler:[1] 'There is a very strong presumption against common speculative truths, and against the most ordinary facts, before the proof of them, which yet is overcome by almost any proof. There is a presumption of millions to one against the story of Cæsar or of any other man.' Yet surely we do not feel called upon to refuse to investigate the particulars of Cæsar's life on that account; nor does the man of science decline to look at a new fact which may be brought under his notice, simply because he has never before heard of such an occurrence. The contrary rather is the case, more than usual interest being felt by the historian in the life of a great man, and by the philosopher in a strange and hitherto unheard-of incident; and in precisely the same way, the

and conscience, which owns the majesty of man as transcending the authority of nature, is infinitely more profound than the philosophy of Hume.'—*Testimony of Christ, etc.*, p. 8.

[1] *Analogy*, Part ii. chap. 2.

very unusual character of a so-called miraculous occurrence ought only to attract more attention to it, and is no adequate reason for objecting to examine it, or holding it incapable of proof.[1] Indeed, in reading Hume's Essay, one can scarcely repress the feeling that its author was conscious, even while writing it, of the weakness and inconclusiveness of his reasoning; for, after all, he virtually abandons his ground. 'I own,' he says, 'there may possibly be miracles or violations of the usual course of nature of such a kind as to admit of a proof from human testimony, though perhaps it will be impossible to find any such in the records of history. Suppose all authors in all languages agree that from the 1st of January

[1] On this point I cannot forbear quoting the clear and cogent language of Dr Lindsay: 'The course of nature furnishes in every case an anterior probability that the event will be such as it hath been before, and all human calculations are grounded on this principle; but the moment an event actually happens, the time for probable calculation is past, and we may know it with the same certainty, whether it never occurred before or occurred a thousand times. If it be quite unusual, that is a reason for scrutinizing every circumstance and deciding slowly; but it is no reason for rejecting the evidence of our senses. The argument before us confounds two very different things,—namely, the anterior probability of what may be to-morrow, and the actual experience of it when it comes; and because the uniformity of nature's laws suggests one result as most likely, you are not allowed to believe

1600 there was a total darkness over the whole earth for eight days. Suppose that the tradition of this extraordinary event is still strong and lively among the people; that all travellers who return from foreign countries bring us accounts of the same tradition, without the least variation or contradiction; it is evident that our present philosophers, instead of doubting of that fact, ought to receive it for certain, and ought to search for the causes whence it might be derived.' [2] Here, then, on our philosopher's own showing, is a case in which the proof in favour of a miracle, so far from being overborne by the experience of nature's uniformity, is reckoned sufficient to establish the credibility of the occurrence; but

another when it actually happens. You cannot believe it until it has happened so frequently as to claim to rank among natural events. But who can doubt that Adam, the first day he saw the sun rise, would be just as certain of the fact as after he had seen it rise every day for a century? The only difference would be, that in the latter case he would have learned to calculate with greater certainty on its return to-morrow; but the evidence of its actual appearance on any day would not be greater than the evidence of its actual appearance the first day it rose. So of a miracle or any wonderful event. You could not calculate on it beforehand; you would expect the reverse; but when it actually did occur, you might be as certain of it as of the most common event.'—*Lecture*, as before, pp. 23, 24.

[1] *Essays*, as before, p. 134.

the effect of this admission is neutralized, and the animus of the whole argument revealed, by the words with which he introduces the passage we have just cited. 'I beg,' says he, 'that these limitations may be remarked, when I say that a miracle can never be proved *so as to be the foundation of a system of religion.*'[1] And why not? Because 'men in all ages have been so much imposed on by ridiculous stories of that kind, that this very circumstance would be a full proof of cheat, and sufficient with all men of sense, not only to make them reject the fact, but even reject it without examination.'[2] Was there ever such an absurdity attempted to be palmed off under colour of good sense? Because men have been so frequently imposed upon by error, therefore there is no such thing as truth; and anything that claims to be true, they may safely reject without examination! Because there are so many spurious coins in circulation, we must reject all money that offers, and that, too, without the slightest investigation! The thing is preposterous. The natural inference from the attempts which have been made to deceive

[1] *Essays*, as before, p. 134. [2] *Ibid.* p. 135.

men by spurious miracles should be, that there is in the human mind some instinctive or intuitive expectation that a revelation from God should be accompanied and accredited by miracle. The supply of false miracles by impostors has been called forth by that principle in the human mind to which true miracles appeal; and just as the existence of bad money gives testimony to the value of that which is genuine, so even the attempts to 'cheat' men by the pseudo-supernatural, furnish an *à priori* argument for the probability of miracles in connection with a religious system; for the impostors never could have succeeded if there had not been in man what we must call an intuitive belief in the supernatural. Hence, to borrow the phrase of a distinguished author,[1] in regard to the religious systems of the heathen nations, the false miracles by which men have been deluded were 'unconscious prophecies' of the true, wherewith the divine revelation has been attended and confirmed; and so far from absolving us from the duty of examining the evidence of the New Tes-

[1] See Archbishop Trench's Hulsean Lectures on *The Unconscious Prophecies of Heathendom.*

tament miracles, the fact that so many 'lying wonders' have imposed on men ought only to urge us to a more thorough investigation of their claims.

But the qualification or limitation which Hume has thus laid down, prejudging as it does the whole question, on the simple ground of its connection with religion, is much more sad when we look at it from its ethical or spiritual side, than when we contemplate it from a logical point of view. Dialectically considered, indeed, it does no great credit either to the candour or the accuracy of his argumentation; but spiritually, it is a most melancholy illustration of the prophet's words, 'The heart is deceitful above all things.' The infidelity of this most acute sceptic seems to have been of the heart rather than the head, and it was most probably to defend the prepossessions of the heart that the artful sophistry of the head was called into requisition. One can hardly believe that a man of his ability could be blind to the logical jugglery and syllogistic sleight of hand by which he sought to outwit his readers; and it is with a sickening feeling that we read his cant words of

mock solemnity, when regarding the Pentateuch, to the miracles of which he has made just the slightest reference, he says, 'I desire any one to lay his hand upon his heart, and after serious consideration declare whether he thinks that the falsehood of such a book, supported by such a testimony, would be more extraordinary than all the miracles it relates!' If he honestly believed in the soundness of his argument, we cannot place him high as a logician; if he was conscious of the sophism he was constructing on such a sacred subject, what shall we say of the moral principle of the man?[1]

In regard to the whole question of the possibility of proving a miracle, this general principle may be laid down, viz. that whatever can actually take place, and be cognizable by the senses of an eye-witness, can be attested by his testimony to others. Whatever I can observe, I can describe and bear witness to. Does not the entire theory of evidence as acted on by men, both legally and socially, depend on that universally admitted maxim? But

[1] See on this point, Wardlaw, p. 112, where that usually gentle controversialist breaks out into a stern and solemn invective; and Bayne's *Testimony*, p. 10.

if this be so, then the inference is clear, that if miracles could occur, they can be proved to have occurred. Hence, to assert that a miracle cannot be proved by testimony, is virtually to deny that there can be a miracle at all. Hume did not openly take that ground, but his argument implies it, and so we might have considered it fully and fairly disposed of when we had proved that miracles are possible. But the inherent weakness and sophistry of his reasoning need anew to be made manifest; and we have dwelt thus long upon it, that we might the better prepare the way for an investigation of the reproduction of it which we find in the pages of Renan.[1] For though it has been frequently exposed, yet ever and anon some new sceptic appears and brings it out again as if it were irrefragable; and the flourish and parade he makes are apt to produce a great impression upon those who have not made themselves acquainted with the apologists of former days. Cowper was right when he said:

[1] For the opinions of two eminent men, not theologians, on the argument of Hume, see Appendix, note B, where extracts from the writings of Lord Brougham and Sir E. B. Lytton will be found.

'The infidel has shot his bolts away,
Till, his exhausted quiver yielding none,
He gleans the blunted shafts that have recoiled,
And aims them at the shield of faith again.'

And that Renan is no exception to this rule will be evident, as we give in full what he has said on the subject of miracles in his introduction to the work which he has called the Life of Christ.

II. ARGUMENT OF RENAN.

Here are his words: 'None of the miracles with which the old histories are filled took place under scientific conditions. Observation, which has never once been falsified, teaches us that miracles never happen but in times and countries in which they are believed, and before persons disposed to believe them. No miracle ever occurred in the presence of men capable of testing its miraculous character. Neither common people nor men of the world are able to do this. It requires great precautions, and long habits of scientific research. In our days have we not seen almost all respectable people dupes of the grossest frauds, or of puerile illusions? Marvellous facts, attested by the whole

population of small towns, have, thanks to a severe scrutiny, been exploded. If it is proved that no contemporary miracle will bear inquiry, is it not probable that the miracles of the past, which have all been performed in popular gatherings, would equally present their share of illusion if it were possible to criticise them in detail? It is not, then, in the name of this or that philosophy, but in the name of universal experience, that we banish miracle from history. We do not say, "Miracles are impossible."[1] We say, "Up to this time a miracle has never been proved." If to-morrow a thaumaturgus present himself with credentials sufficiently important to be discussed, and announce himself as able, say, to raise the dead, what would be done? A commission, composed of physiologists, physicists, chemists, persons accustomed to historical criticism, would be named. This commission would choose a corpse; would assure itself that death was real; would select the room in which the experiment should be made; would arrange the whole system of precautions, so as to

[1] Yet in another place he speaks of 'the notion of the supernatural with its impossibilities.'—See *Life of Jesus*, as before, p. 59.

leave no chance of doubt. If, under such conditions, the resurrection were effected, a probability almost equal to certainty would be established. As, however, it ought to be possible always to repeat an experiment—to do over again [that] which has been done once; and as in the order of miracle there can be no question of ease or difficulty, the thaumaturgus would be invited to reproduce his marvellous act under other circumstances, upon other corpses, in another place. If the miracle succeeded each time, two things would be proved: first, that supernatural events happen in the world; second, that the power of producing them belongs, or is delegated to, certain persons. But who does not see that no miracle ever took place under these conditions? but that always hitherto the thaumaturgus has chosen the subject of the experiment, chosen the spot, chosen the public; that, besides, the people themselves — most commonly in consequence of the invincible want to see something divine in great events and great men — create the marvellous legends afterwards? Until a new order of things prevails, we shall maintain, then, this principle of

historical criticism, that a supernatural account cannot be admitted as such; that it always implies credulity or imposture; that the duty of the historian is to explain it, and seek to ascertain what share of truth or of error it may conceal.'[1]

There is here, in all the leading features of the argument, an entire identity with that which we have already disposed of; there is the same appeal to 'experience,' which is quietly assumed to be 'universal;' there is the same insinuation that the miracles of the gospel stand on a level with modern pretensions to the supernatural, and founded on that, the same refusal even to investigate their claims; while, after all, in the imaginary case that is put before the reader, there is the same virtual abandonment of the principle on which the objection is based; without, however, let us do Renan the justice of adding, the same qualifying limitation which Hume imposed. Still, as there are some specific differences, designed, as it would seem, to adapt the argument to our own days, we may profitably spend a little time in its dissection.

[1] *Life of Jesus*, as before, pp. 29, 30.

First, let us look at the assertion, that 'observation, which has never once been falsified, teaches us that miracles never happen but in times and countries in which they are believed, and before persons disposed to believe them.' We do not think that it would be difficult to find instances from among the miracles of the New Testament to which these words would not apply, and perhaps before we finish this investigation we may direct attention to one of the kind; but, meanwhile, we ask our readers to take notice of the general principle which he designs to insinuate under this apparently harmless statement. He means to convey the idea that a miracle would be more credible to him, and should be more credible to others, if at the time when it was wrought it was disbelieved by those who witnessed it. But is this true? Would not M. Renan himself be the first to reject a miracle which was not attested by the experience of those to whom at first it was submitted? Would he not at once allege, that if those who were present at the time did not believe it, it is preposterous to ask that we should admit its reality? Besides, does not this render it im-

possible to establish any miracle? For it must either have been believed or rejected by those who were present with the miracle-worker. If it were believed by them, then our author is ready with his assertion, that 'miracles are ordinarily the work of the public much more than of him to whom they are attributed;'[1] if it were not believed by them, then, of course, it would be said that the testimony even of those who were present conclusively settled that they were spurious. Thus on both sides is he armed. Offer him proof, and he replies, 'The witnesses were credulous, and more than half the miracle was in their desire to see it.' Tell him that those before whom it was wrought did not receive it, and he will immediately retort, 'On what principle am I asked to do what they, with their ampler opportunities for examination, refused to do?' What, then, would he have? and how can he be satisfied? Truly such a spirit as this recalls the Master's words, 'Whereunto shall I liken the men of this generation? and to what are they like? They are like children sitting in the market-place, and

[1] *Life of Jesus*, as before, p. 196.

calling one to another, and saying, We have piped unto you, and ye have not danced; we have mourned unto you, and ye have not wept. But Wisdom is justified of her children.'[1] There must therefore be some other course than this if we would follow wisdom.

But it may be said that he has qualified his assertion, inasmuch as in the latter part of the sentence he speaks of the persons not only as having actually believed, but also as having been disposed to believe them; and there is no doubt a wide difference between the two, but the distinction will not help him. For the New Testament contains numerous instances of miracles performed before those who, so far from being disposed to believe them, actually sought out grounds on which to reject them. Of this sort were the opening of the eyes of the man born blind, John ix.; the healing of the lame man at the Beautiful gate, Acts v. 16, 17; the raising of Lazarus, John xi. 46; and, as we shall presently make evident, the resurrection of the Lord himself. Now, in the face of these and other similar cases,

[1] Luke vii. 31, 32, 35.

—not to speak of that of Paul, who was certainly very far from being disposed to believe in the miracles of Jesus when the light from heaven smote him to the ground,—it is neither just nor reasonable to allege that supernatural works have never been performed, except before persons predisposed in their favour. It is quite possible, indeed, that M. Renan may endeavour to escape the force of this reply by denying the authenticity of these portions of the sacred books; but admitting that, as he does, when it suits his purpose, we cannot permit him to avail himself of the subterfuge of denying it when the exigencies of argument make it expedient for him to do so. If the Gospels are historic in those portions on which he raises his battering-ram of attack, we should like to see on what distinct principles they are denied to be so in those places where we erect our engines of defence. Such an answer to our reply, therefore, would be to cut the knot, not to loose it.

Further, what does the writer mean when he declares that 'none of the miracles with which old histories are filled took place under scientific

conditions'? Is it indeed the case, that 'neither common people nor men of the world are capable of testing a miracle'? If the miracles of the Gospels (and it is only those with which these 'old histories' are filled that we care to defend) had been wrought alone on substances with which only men of science are familiar, then there might be some show of reason in the assertion; but if they were performed, as they were, in the region of common life, in which the common sense of the multitude is just as sure a guide as the precision of the man of science, then his allegation is most false and fallacious. Take the case, for example, of a dead man raised to life. Rightly here Renan would make the most strict investigation turn on the question, whether or not he had been really dead; but is it true that only a commission composed of 'physicists, physiologists, chemists, and persons accustomed to historical criticism,' can decide such a question as that? When our friends depart, we do not think it needful to hold an inquest before such a body of learned men, before we can determine whether they are dead or not; nay, even though a case or two of premature

interment may happen in an age, that does not prevent us from relying on our own judgment in the matter. We can tell, without the aid of any scientific commission, when death appears. Its concomitants and consequences are not so recondite as to require a '*post-mortem*' to make it clear that death has really happened. Now, if that be true in ordinary life, why, in the case of a dead man that has been raised again, should we demand evidence of another sort than that on which we act when we take it upon us 'to bury our dead out of our sight'? By and by we shall produce a case which ought to satisfy even M. Renan; but we cannot but declare that his demand for a commission of scientific men is altogether unnecessary, and in the circumstances perfectly unwarranted. No doubt the very fact that the person has been raised to life again should, from its unusual occurrence, dispose us to examine minutely into the evidence that he had been really dead; but that is a different thing from saying that we should have a special sort of evidence, differing in kind and not simply in degree, from that which is generally acted on in such cases.

A learned judge, not long ago, in a trial which excited universal interest, laid down the principle, that an amount of evidence which would satisfy the jury in acting one way or other in their most important business concerns, would be enough to warrant them in determining the guilt or innocence of the prisoner, even though his life were trembling in the balance; and similarly, an amount of evidence such as would justify us in proceeding to the interment of any member of our family, ought to be sufficient to establish the reality of death in the case of one who has been raised again from the dead.

But perhaps Renan, in demanding this scientific commission, may only wish to determine whether or not the so-called miraculous work was done by the introduction of some natural causes of which the multitude were ignorant, but with which the members of the commission might be familiar. If this be his idea, then we may at once admit that marvellous things do sometimes take place, which careful investigation by competent parties afterwards makes clear; but where is the scientific explanation of the miracles

of Christ? The facts are before the world, and have been tested by the science of eighteen hundred years; yet they have never been accounted for on natural principles, or reproduced by the most eminently scientific men. If, therefore, science has detected other impositions, how have these, supposing them to be impositions, eluded her vigilance? Is it not because they lie in a region beyond her ken? The line which divides the natural from the supernatural is not always very easily defined. Yet in this instance we do not need science to make it clear; for, in the words of a writer to whom we have occasionally already referred:[1] 'The great bulk of the miracles of Scripture are distinguished from common events by so broad a line, that if we admit the fact of their occurrence, we cannot with any reason question their miraculous character. Besides, we must not overlook that the miracles of Scripture took place not spontaneously, but at the command of some individual man. A human mouth speaks,

[1] Dr Lindsay, *Lecture*, as above, pp. 26, 27. Other remarks on this point will be found in a subsequent page, where we seek to show that the apostles were quite competent to judge of the miraculous character of the works done by Jesus.

and the blind see, the deaf hear, the rigid joint relaxes. Christ says, "Lazarus, come forth," and the dead man stands alive before him. To allow such facts, and yet to say that they may have sprung from natural causes, is to concede to Christ a mastery over nature's secrets unequalled since the world began; which, if he were a mere man, and his religion a fable, is not less miraculous than all the miracles recorded in Scripture.' Even men of science, in the presence of such works as he performed, would, if candid and unbiassed men, lower their pretensions, and say with the magicians, when they could no longer imitate Moses, 'This is the finger of God.'

Nor is this all: are scientific men, such as 'physiologists, physicists, and chemists,' not just as liable to be imposed upon as others? We apprehend it would not be difficult to bring together a list of instances in which the credulity of many modern '*savans*' would appear in a most ridiculous light, as showing that their prepossessions and prejudices very largely affect their conclusions, and make them act in some cases in a manner altogether inconsistent with just prin-

ciples of 'historical criticism.'[1]. Besides, where is the question on which scientific men will not be found ranged on either side, uttering the most opposite things? Let any one throw himself back upon the records of important trials in our own land for the last ten years, and think of the conflicting statements in relation to poisons and insanity which have been put forth by one class of men of science among us, and if after that he be disposed to place implicit faith in a commission of 'chemists and physicists,' we shall be greatly surprised. There are subjects which the mass of the people understand, to say the least, as well as men of science, and on which the judgment of the community, howsoever it may be arrived at, is more reliable than theirs. In writing thus we mean no disrespect to the great body of earnest and philosophic thinkers who are numbered among our men of science; we only allege that they have not a monopoly of common

[1] For proof of this, and of the fact that the satirical exposure of the credulity of antiquarians in Sir W. Scott's *Antiquary* is quite as applicable to some of our modern men of science, see *The Abbeville Jaw:* An Episode in a Great Controversy. By the Rev. J. L. Rome, F.G.S. Longman. A most able, convincing, and humorous brochure.

sense, to the utter exclusion of the 'common people and the men of the world.'

But to proceed with our anatomy of this plausible argument. Observe how the miracles of Christ are first classed with 'the gross frauds and puerile illusions with which almost all respectable people in these days have been duped;' and then see how, because contemporary miracles will not bear scrutiny, it is held as probable that those of Jesus were impostures, and could be proved to be so if it were possible to criticise them in detail. Now, on the first point we will not insult our readers by bringing forth any reasons why we refuse to degrade the gospel miracles, by allowing them to be placed side by side with those said to be performed by St Francis and St Vincent de Paul:[1] the simple reading of the records in which they are severally reported, will be enough to show any one the difference between them; but in any case, we demand that those of our Lord be looked at by themselves, and judged upon their own merits. Still, as reference has been made to the expo-

[1] For an able examination of the alleged miracles of St Francis, see the Rev. J. B. Paton's review of *Vie de Jesus*.

sure of contemporary miracles, we may be allowed to insist upon this, that if spurious miracles among us have been detected by the scrutiny of those who have examined them, would not those of Jesus, if they were impositions, have been discovered and exposed by the men of his own time? We too readily take it for granted, that in the matters of shrewdness and penetration we of this nineteenth century are superior to those who lived in Palestine in the first half of the first. The age in which our Lord appeared was undeniably the most cultivated which the world up till that time had seen; the people among whom he lived were not deficient either in intelligence or in the faculty of observation; there was, moreover, wherever he went, a section of the community animated by the most bitter hatred of him and of his doctrines, who watched him eagerly that they might 'entangle him in his talk,' and if possible prove him a deceiver; yet, though every work he did was scanned through the keen microscope of malice, it was never alleged that his miracles were not real. Sometimes, indeed, they tried to ascribe them to Satanic agency, but it was

never insinuated that they were impostures. But human nature was the same then that it is now; and as the miracles *lay in no hidden region which it required scientific knowledge to understand*, it is impossible to believe that the scribes and Pharisees, though we may grant their inferiority to the scientific men of our times, could not have detected their spuriousness if they were false. That with all their bitter antagonism to him, they failed to do so, we must ever hold to be one great proof of the fact that these 'mighty works' were genuine.

But leaving these skilfully put and plausible assertions, let us look at the evidence in behalf of one of our Lord's miracles, and see if we have not an amount of proof which, judging from the case which he has put before us, ought to satisfy even M. Renan. We say *ought* to satisfy him, for after all we feel persuaded that if every condition prescribed by himself were complied with to the very letter, he would yet contrive to evade the conclusions which he seems to admit would in that case be logically deducible. We do not forget who it was that said, 'If they believe not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be per-

suaded though one rose from the dead,'—words as deeply true to-day as when they were first uttered. Still, that we may show that even on Renan's own ground the evidence is satisfactory, let us take the miracle of our Lord's resurrection, and see if in the main it do not satisfy all his 'scientific conditions.'

In the first place, the disciples were not looking for his resurrection, neither were they *à priori* disposed to believe it;[1] for though Jesus himself had repeatedly referred to it in his intercourse with them, they had at the time misunderstood his meaning, and they had afterwards forgotten his words. Nothing seems more clear on the face of the record than that the resurrection took the disciples by surprise; hence they had no prepossession in favour of believing it, and so on this point they are witnesses according to Renan's own heart.

Again, Christ was really dead. This is admitted by Renan himself, who gives an account of the crucifixion scene, and ends with a strange rhapsodical apostrophe to Jesus. But in order to

[1] 'Their words seemed to them as idle tales, and they believed them not.'—Luke xxiv. 11.

show that even no man of science need have doubt on this point, we may simply recall the facts, that the soldiers, accustomed to look on death, and who therefore knew it when they saw it, did not break the legs of Jesus, for they perceived he was dead already; and that one of them, to make assurance doubly sure, 'with a spear pierced his side, and forthwith came thereout blood and water.' Now, strangely enough, a scientific commission, so to speak, though at the distance of eighteen centuries, has sat upon this occurrence, and has given a decision on it to the effect that death was not caused by the spear-thrust, but that the blood and water which flowed from the wound showed that a very short while before, Jesus had died of a broken heart.[1] About the reality of his death, therefore, there can be no dispute.

Next let us look at the sepulchre. This, as we know, was not a place chosen by those who wished to have it as the best possible 'in which the experiment should be made,' but virtually it was all

[1] See this subject very fully treated by Dr Hanna in his *Last Day of our Lord's Passion*, pp. 290, etc.; see also the appendix to the same work, where the opinion of Dr Stroud is corroborated by that of Drs Begbie, Simpson, and Struthers.

that any scientific commission could have desired, for it was a new tomb, in which no body had ever been laid, and where, therefore, there was no possibility of substituting one corpse for another; besides this, it was closely secured by the stone and seal, and strictly watched by the guard of soldiers. Here, therefore, great precautions were exercised; but how utterly useless they all were!

> 'Hell and the grave combined their force
> To hold our Lord in vain;
> Sudden the Conqueror arose,
> And burst their feeble chain.'

In proof of this resurrection we appeal to the testimony of those who saw him 'alive after his passion,' and who had no motive for saying other than the truth. He was really dead; they saw him afterwards alive, with such marks of identity as made it clear to them that it was he. Can any evidence be better? To all this, however, M. Renan only says, 'Such was the impression he had left in the hearts of his disciples, and of a few devoted women, that during some weeks more it was as if he were living and consoling them. Had his body been taken away? or did enthusiasm, always credulous, create afterwards the

group of narratives by which it was sought to establish faith in his resurrection? In the absence of opposing documents, this can never be ascertained. Let us say, however, that the strong imagination of Mary Magdalene played an important part in this circumstance.'[1] Verily, with such historical criticism as this, we could disprove the occurrence of the facts of yesterday! Because there are no 'opposing documents,' it can never be ascertained whether his body was taken away, or whether the enthusiasm of his followers did not create the story of his resurrection! What a canon of criticism have we here! Whatever statement in history is unopposed by any document must be doubted, and the truth about it can never be ascertained. Must we then hold also, that the most disputed things are those of which we have most certainty? and if so, must we not write history by the rule of contrary, putting the uncontradicted for the false, and the disputed for the true? Truly, when witnesses are consentaneous, it is an easy way of disposing of their evidence to say, that because there is no

[1] *Life of Jesus*, English Translation as before, p. 296.

opposing statement, the real state of the case cannot be discovered.

Besides, on what principle is the New Testament record accepted for some parts of the story and rejected for others? We cannot allow M. Renan thus to trample under foot the laws of historic evidence; and we insist that if the Gospels be accepted on such matters as he receives, they be regarded also as at least credible statements of what the witnesses themselves have said on other points. Now, we find that not 'the imagination of Mary Magdalene' only, but the sober sense of John and Peter, the observation of the ten apostles in the upper room, and the very scepticism of Thomas which was so thoroughly removed, all go together to establish the fact of the Saviour's reappearance. Nor was it only an impression of weeks; for Paul, writing at least thirty years after the event, could say, 'He was seen of about five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some have fallen asleep; last of all, he was seen of me also.'[1] Here, then, we have a

[1] 1 Cor. xv. 6, 8.

miracle which took the disciples by surprise, and was performed as nearly as possible under scientific conditions. All that is needed to complete Renan's requirements is its repetition again and again; but as the resurrection of Christ was itself the fourth miracle of the kind which Jesus wrought, each one ascending above the other in regular gradation up to this last and crowning one, we may hold that even that is satisfied, and press him to the admission of his two conclusions: first, that supernatural events happen in the world; and second, that the power of producing them belongs or is delegated to certain persons. Without waiting for any 'new order of things to prevail,'[1] therefore, we insist on it that he abandon the principle that a supernatural event cannot be admitted as such, but always implies either credulity or imposture; and over against his treatment of the miracles and resurrection of Christ, we take

[1] We cannot see, indeed, how Renan needs thus to qualify his words, for on his principle how is a 'new order of things' to be introduced? how are men to prove it when it comes? and how, without credulity, is it to be acknowledged as real? The phrase, however, is valuable, as revealing that in a moment of unconsciousness even he returns to the common modes of expression, and the recognition of the truths that lie beneath them.

leave to place the statement of one of whose name and fame England is justly proud, and who is entitled in this department to be heard with deference. Dr Arnold of Rugby, in one of those sermons to the 'boys' which are so full of manliness and true Christian nobleness, has said: 'The evidence of our Lord's life and death and resurrection may be, and often has been, shown to be satisfactory; it is good according to the common rules for distinguishing good evidence from bad. Thousands and tens of thousands of persons have gone through it piece by piece as carefully as ever judge summed up on a most important cause. I have myself done it many times over, not to persuade others, but to satisfy myself. I have been used for many years to study the history of other times, and to examine and weigh the evidence of those who have written about them, and *I know of no one fact in the history of mankind which is proved by better and fuller evidence of every sort, to the understanding of a fair inquirer, than the great sign which God hath given us that Christ died and rose again from the dead.*'[1]

[1] *Sermons on Christian Life*, pp. 15, 16.

V.

EVIDENCE IN BEHALF OF MIRACLES.

HAVING removed the barriers which some have attempted to place in the way even of an investigation of the miracles of the New Testament, we are now prepared to consider the evidence by which they are attested. For this purpose we must betake ourselves to the gospel narratives themselves; nor let any one imagine that in doing so we are pursuing a course which is unwarranted or illogical. We are not now taking for granted the divine authority of these documents: we are, as in the outset we were careful to show, examining their credibility; and in settling that, it is indispensable that we look to the statements which they contain. These books are, to use a common expression, the depositions of the witnesses; and as in a court of justice it is impossible to judge of the credibility of those who

give evidence apart from the evidence they give, so we cannot hope to arrive at any right conclusion as to the worth of this testimony without examining it; only let it be understood that we view it now as an ordinary deposition, and not yet as a supernatural production.

I. THE TESTIMONY OF THE LORD JESUS HIMSELF.

Bearing these things in mind, then, we find in the Gospels passages which undoubtedly affirm that the Lord Jesus Christ himself claimed to be a worker of miracles. Now, we may very fairly and honestly ask, whether such an one, as all through these narratives he is represented as being, would make this claim if it were ill-founded and untrue. We have it here asserted, that when the disciples of John the Baptist came in their master's name to ask, 'Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another?' Jesus answered, 'Go and show John again those things which ye do hear and see: the blind receive their sight, and the lame walk; the lepers are cleansed, and the

[1] Matt. xi. 5, 6.

deaf hear; the dead are raised to life, and the poor have the gospel preached to them.' Again, to the Jews he said,[1] 'I have greater witness than that of John: for the works which the Father hath given me to finish, the same works that I do, bear witness of me, that the Father hath sent me.' And on another occasion he expressed himself thus:[2] 'If I do not the works of my Father, believe me not. But if I do, though ye believe not me, believe the works; that ye may know and believe that the Father is in me, and I in him.' Here, then, is a plain, open, and repeated affirmation on the part of Jesus himself that he wrought miracles; and the question is, Can we believe *him?* If we cannot, then we must regard him as having been either an impostor, who made a claim which he knew to be false; or a visionary enthusiast, arrogating to himself a power which he really had not, but which he honestly believed that he possessed.

Let us first ask, Was he an impostor? Those who answer this question in the affirmative commonly allege, that as the Messiah was expected

[1] John v. 36. [2] John x. 37, 38.

to work miracles, it was quite to be supposed that Jesus, in laying claim to that office, should make pretensions to the supernatural. He could not have hoped, as they affirm, to have succeeded without conforming in this respect to the requirements of the people; and therefore, whether or not it entered into his original design, he was in a manner forced to assume the character of a worker of miracles. Now, waiving the consideration that this view makes of very little account the discernment and sagacity of the people of Judea, who, so far as we know, were just as able to detect any trickery of the sort that is implied as we are, we find it inconceivable that Jesus should have made false pretensions in this matter in order to secure the favour of the people, while in other respects he ran directly counter to their most cherished prepossessions. It is well known to every student, that in the time of Christ the Jewish ideal of what their Messiah was to be was entirely different from what Jesus was. They expected him to be a temporal prince, and hoped that he would work out for them a great deliverance from that foreign dominion under which

they felt so humiliated. Looking now at the prophecies, in the light of what we believe to be their fulfilment, we are surprised that they should have formed such a one-sided and partial notion of the person and work of their Messiah; nevertheless the fact is undeniable. Even the disciples of Jesus themselves were found nursing to the very last this fond anticipation, and repeatedly the same view is expressed by the common people in their intercourse with him. On one occasion, indeed, there seemed nothing wanting on his part to secure the universal favour of the multitude but the proclamation of his earthly royalty. Still he refused to yield, and because he would not be the king they wanted, many went back, and walked no more with him.[1] Here, then, is an inconsistency which, on the ground taken up by those who affect to believe that Jesus claimed to be a miracle-worker in order to pander to the prejudices of the multitude, cannot be explained away.[2] If he yielded to them on the one point,

[1] John vi. 15, 66.

[2] Renan's account of this transaction is: 'One day, it is said, the simple men of Galilee wished to carry him away, and make him king; but Jesus fled into the mountain, and remained there some

why not also on the other? and if he refused to conform to the prepossessions of the people at a time when his yielding was all that was needed to float him to success, is it conceivable that, in the matter of the miracles, he should have made a claim which he knew to be false, simply with the view of suiting himself to the ideas of the multitude? 'Who live to please, must please to live,' is a principle on which all impostors have acted; and had there been nothing better in Jesus than the mere adroitness of a deceiver, he would undoubtedly have yielded to the pressure of the populace, and raised the standard of a new royalty in the land. But that he so solemnly and steadily refused their importunity on this head, clearly shows that he had some nobler principle to guide him than the love of popular applause, and makes

time alone. His noble nature preserved him from the error which would have made him an agitator, or a chief of rebels, a Theudas, or a Barkokeba' (p. 108). But if his noble nature kept him from this error, would it not have kept him also from that of pretending to have a power which he really had not? We doubt, however, if M. Renan can see the moral obliquity which such a course would imply, at least his work is full of expressions that indicate a low standard of rectitude; for instance, he says (p. 91), 'To conceive the good, in fact, is not sufficient; it must be made to succeed amongst men. To accomplish this, *less pure paths* must be fol-

untenable the view of those who hold that he was in a manner forced to pretend to work miracles, in order to secure the favour of the common people. He was no more compelled to do that than he was to yield to their urgent entreaties in the matter of the kingdom; and that he refused in this latter case, is a proof that, in regard to the miracles, there was some higher aim before him than the pleasing of the populace.

But apart from this, the idea that Jesus was an impostor is beset with moral difficulties that are absolutely insuperable. For the record that contains his claim to the possession of supernatural power, gives us at the same time such a description of his moral nature as is utterly inconsistent with the supposition that he could knowingly speak that which was false. Consider the attri-

lowed.' Again: 'Sometimes Jesus employed *an innocent artifice* (the italics are ours) which Joan of Arc also used; he affected to know something intimate respecting him whom he wished to gain, or he would perhaps recall to him some circumstance dear to his heart' (p. 133). And yet once more: 'Nothing great has been established which does not rest on a legend. *The only culprit* in such cases is the humanity which is willing to be deceived' (p. 187). All this reveals too sadly that Renan has not yet outgrown his early training in the casuistry of the Jesuits.

butes of character by which he was distinguished. His meekness and humility were only equalled by his honesty and benevolence. There was about him a conscientious thoroughness which was carried out at every sacrifice; and so far from having that love of ostentation which might have been expected in a deceiver, there was rather the disposition to check the impulsive ardour of those who wished to blaze abroad the glory of his power. His Sermon on the Mount evinces that, above and beyond all other things in religion, he delighted in 'truth in the inward parts,' and held in utter abhorrence that cold and hollow ritualism which is content with 'the form of godliness while denying its power.' Never was there such an equipoise of moral attributes as we find in him. To an all-embracing love, he joined a sternness of principle which exposed wrong wherever he found it, and insisted on faithfulness even in that which is least. With the humility of a child, there was combined in him the sublime self-consciousness of the divine I AM; and with the tenderness of woman there was associated the courage of a

hero; yea, in him every moral quality resided in its normal state, no one shading or eclipsing another. Before the portrait which these evangelists have painted, men of every age have stood in rooted admiration; and even among those who, as we think, blasphemously deny him divinity, he is held in estimation as the noblest of men. For centuries his life has been the object of the keenest investigation: 'through all this tract of years' men have looked at him

> 'In that fierce light which beats upon a throne,
> And blackens every blot;'

but still they have seen in him, and that too in a far higher sense than the poet has employed the words, only

> 'The white flower of a blameless life.'[1]

As one has very correctly put it, 'No character known to history has been subjected to scrutiny so piercing as that of Jesus Christ; and there is no character known to history except his, of which moral perfection could for a moment be maintained. It is beyond doubt that no being has yet appeared in human form, whom the suffrage of

[1] Tennyson.

the race has pronounced so pure, so holy, as Jesus Christ.'[1] From the very spotlessness of the picture, an argument as forcible as it is eloquent has been drawn by a powerful thinker,[2] for the divinity of the original; but for the present we put the matter thus,—Is it likely, is it conceivable, is it *morally possible*, that such a man should deliberately and habitually make a claim which, as an impostor, he knew to be false? Look at his honesty in other things, and consider if it be in harmony with his character that he should be dishonest in this. He never enticed a man to follow him by false pretences; he never sought to gain adherents by dazzling their eyes with bright visions of unbroken ease. He said, 'If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow me.'[3] He desired those who came to him to 'count the cost'[4] when they attached themselves to him, lest, meeting unexpected difficulties, they should be discouraged

[1] Bayne's *Testimony of Christ to Christianity*, pp. 67, 68.

[2] Bushnell's *Nature and the Supernatural*, chap. x. p. 213. The chapter has been published separately, and is one of the noblest expositions of the character of our Lord, and of the evidence afforded by it to his divinity, which our language contains.

[3] Luke ix. 23. [4] Luke xiv. 27–30.

and turn back. Now, if he was thus frank, fair, and candid in this matter, is it consistent with probability to suppose that he was deceitful in regard to the miracles? Verily, if he were a deceiver, instead of being ranked with the noblest of men, he must be numbered with the basest of mankind; for he knew the right and the true far better than others whose sayings have been recorded and preserved, and the deception being that of one with the clearest moral perceptions, must be characterized as the most aggravated of iniquities. If the claims he made were untrue, then in making them he was sinning against the brightest light, and at the same time trifling with the most sacred interests of humanity. Thus the miracles and the moral character of Jesus must stand or fall together. If they were true, then still may we gaze in love and admiration on that spotless one, and feel that in worshipping him we are guilty of no idolatry; but if they were false, and his claim to work them a lie, then must we turn away from him in execration, hating even his apparent moral excellence, as being but the garment of light wherein another Satan has arrayed himself. To

this issue we fearlessly put the case: if we accept the common view of the character of Jesus, we are shut up to receive his miracles; if we deny his miracles, and look upon him as an impostor in pretending to work them, we are equally obliged to deny to him that exalted purity with which his name has been commonly associated. There is no middle course. Some, indeed, appear to imagine that it is possible for them to let the miracles go, while yet they keep what they are pleased to call the spirit of Jesus. But of what sort is that spirit that can deliberately and habitually lie, while yet it has the clearest perception of the right and the true? And is it worth the keeping? Those are the questions which these loose thinkers have to consider, — for Jesus is himself the 'leading' witness to the truth of his miracles, and if they repudiate them they cannot receive or retain his spirit; since, as Bushnell has excellently said, 'that spirit unabridged is itself the grand miracle of Christianity, about which all the others play, as scintillations only of the central fire.'[1] To suppose, therefore, that he

[1] *Nature and the Supernatural*, p. 284.

could be an impostor, is as inconsistent with the spirit which he breathed as it is with the character which he bore.[1]

But there remains yet this question to be asked concerning Jesus; namely, Was he a visionary enthusiast, believing himself to possess a power which he really had not? Now here it must be conceded that many such individuals have appeared at different times on the world's stage; but of them all it may be affirmed, either that they were signally deficient in intellectual balance, or that they were wanting in moral principle, or that both of these privations were combined in them. We have seen, however, that Jesus cannot be said to have been deceitful or immoral;[2] we have now therefore to ask whether there was about him any such mental peculiarity as to render it probable

[1] The moral incongruities incidental to the view we have been exposing are well illustrated by the manner in which Renan deals with the character of Jesus, for an exposure of which by the hand of a master see Appendix C.

[2] On this point Mr Bayne very justly says: 'It is a notable fact that honest and manly characters, though inflamed in the highest degree with religious enthusiasm, have not been betrayed into the fancy that they possessed miraculous power. Mohammed lived in a barbarous age, among a barbarous people, and announced himself as the prophet of God, commissioned to overturn the religious institutions of his nation. He was a vehement enthu-

or conceivable that he should foolishly believe himself to be what he really was not. It would, however, be out of place in a condensed argument like this, to enter upon an exhaustive analysis of the intellectual powers of Jesus, as these are brought out before us in the gospel narratives; we may simply say, that no one can read these records without feeling that the mind of Christ was pre-eminently a *healthy* one, and that his intellect was admirably balanced. There is no morbid exaggeration of any faculty to the detriment of the rest; the speculative does not destroy the practical, neither does the practical interfere with the speculative. His mind, as it is here presented to us, is full-orbed and complete. In other men we must discover that, no matter how great they are in some respects, they are signally de-

siast; his imagination luxuriated in descriptions of the bliss of Paradise; his words, compared with those of Christ, are as the wild flashings of a torch to the serene and steady burning of a lamp. But Mohammed was never deluded into the belief that he could work miracles. He expressly declared that he could not. A striking illustration of the fact on which I insist is furnished by the biography of Edward Irving. His mind was violently heated by enthusiasm. He believed implicitly in the visions and revelations of the enthusiasts by whom he was surrounded. But he was an upright man. Even in his aberrations he was a powerfully-

ficient in others; but in Jesus we have 'the vision and the faculty divine' by which the poet is distinguished, and along with that the philosophic faculty in the highest development, while at the same time we have the sagacity and shrewd common sense of a practical man of the world. There is in him thus a wonderful 'harmony of opposites,' and we cannot peruse the account of his treatment of the different classes of men with whom he came into contact, without having the conviction forced upon us that this is no crazy fanatic or hair-brained enthusiast. In point of intellectual ability he must be placed above Zeno, or Socrates, or Plato, or Aristotle; and in the matter of practical wisdom there is not one of them who may be even compared with him. He is as far removed as possible from the mere one-sided

minded man. The result was, that, while wondering that privileges were not vouchsafed to him similar to those of the persons in whom he believed, he never imagined that he was supernaturally gifted or visited. It has been proved that Christ was morally sound. It has been shown that even infidels recoil from the startling impossibility of his perpetrating a trick. Was his enthusiasm then so uncontrollable, or his intellectual faculty so weak, that he was beguiled into delusions from which common sense guarded Mohammed and Edward Irving?'—*Testimony of Christ, etc.*, pp. 77, 78.

man; he looks all round every subject, and sees with unerring precision and at once the principle by which it is to be settled. He is not carried away by impulse or caprice; but his emotions rise out of his judgment, and are as sound as their source. Even those who cavil at his system, and refuse to receive it entire, are forward to confess all this. Renan himself has said, 'that his admirable good sense guided him with marvellous certainty;'[1] that 'his leading quality was an infinite delicacy,'[2] and that 'he laid with rare forethought the foundations of a church destined to endure.'[3] Now we may safely ask if such a man, judging him at present by no higher than a human standard, was likely to become a cracked enthusiast, believing himself to have a power which he did not possess? Recollect that the deposition which declares that he professed to work miracles, declares also that he 'possessed the most clear, balanced, serene, and comprehensive intellect known to history;'[4] and then the dilemma appears as before. Either we must receive this description

[1] *Life of Jesus*, as above, p. 108.
[2] *Ibid.* p. 209.
[3] *Ibid.* p. 207.
[4] Bayne, p. 79.

of his intellectual character, and with it receive his miracles; or if we hold, that though his miracles were false he sincerely believed he could work them, then we must reject the account which has been given us of his mental greatness. But it is absolutely inconceivable, that such a man should have been so egregiously silly, as to believe himself a miracle-worker when he was nothing of the kind. To suppose such a mental incongruity is to do violence to human nature, and requires us to believe that which would be a psychological impossibility. To all this it falls to be added, that Jesus sealed his testimony with his blood, and went calmly and heroically to the cross, not viewing it as an unexpected termination of his career, but rather regarding it as the great sacrifice of his priestly office, and submitting to it in such a way as to be quite incongruous with the idea that he was a deceiver, and absolutely inconsistent with the notion that he was himself the victim of a mental hallucination. Let all this be taken candidly and dispassionately into account, and then say if there be anything in this testimony which warrants us to reject it. But the

history which contains the claim of Jesus to work miracles, contains also this description of himself; so that the choice lies between rejecting the miracles, and with them the whole story of the love and life and death of Jesus, and receiving them both. Here we might leave the whole matter, sure what the verdict of a thoughtful man must be, for the Jesus of the Gospels will not lightly be let go by any one who loves the true, the beautiful, and the good; and we may conclude this section in the eloquent words of Bushnell: 'If the miracles, if revelation itself, cannot stand upon the superhuman character of Christ, then let it fall. If that character does not contain all truth, and centralize all truth in itself, then let there be no truth; if there is anything not worthy of belief found in this, we may well consent to live and die without it. Before this sovereign light, streaming out from God, the deep questions, and dark surmises and doubts unresolved, which make a night so gloomy and terrible about us, hurry away to their native abyss. God who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give

us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. This it is that has conquered the assaults of doubt and false learning in all past ages, and will in all ages to come. No argument against the sun will drive it from the sky. No mole-eyed scepticism, dazzled by its brightness, can turn away the shining it refuses to look upon. And they who long after God will be ever turning their eyes thitherward, and either with reason or without reason, or if need be against manifold impediments of reason, will see and believe.' [1]

II. THE TESTIMONY OF THE APOSTLES AND OTHER WITNESSES.

In considering the evidence given by the apostles and early disciples of Jesus to the reality of his miracles, there are two preliminary circumstances which require to be taken into account.

[1] *Nature and the Supernatural*, p. 285. I cannot pass from this part of the argument which I am prosecuting, without saying how deeply I have been indebted here, as indeed throughout, to the able work of Mr Peter Bayne. The reader who desires to see more fully and elaborately treated the value of Christ's testimony to his miracles, is referred to the book itself, where he will find reasoning both clear and cogent, expressed in a style of the most

1. *They had perfect opportunities for investigating the wondrous works to which they gave testimony.* The miracles of Jesus were not wrought in secret; they were not 'done in a corner,' neither did they require darkness for their performance; but they were wrought in open day, before enemies and friends alike, and the fullest opportunity of exposing them, if they were forgeries, was given to the world. On one or two occasions, indeed, none but the three favoured disciples were present; but even then we have every word established in the mouth of two or three witnesses; and at all other times there was the most open and undisguised procedure. The daughter of Jairus was raised to life, in spite of the mocking scorn of those who were perfectly convinced that she was dead; and though the scoffers were excluded from the chamber, the father and the mother of the maiden, and the 'first three' of the apostles, were present with him at the time. The widow's

chastened elegance, and illustrated by the figures of a fine fancy, and by facts which evince an extensive acquaintance with the events of history. Ere yet Renan's book had been published, we have here sketched with marvellous accuracy the theory on which his work is constructed, and we are shown how it is to be controverted.

son was recalled to life at the gate of Nain, the place of public concourse, and in the presence of all who bore the bier and followed it; and Lazarus was brought out of the sepulchre before a promiscuous assemblage of individuals, who had come from Jerusalem to comfort his sorrowing sisters. So with the rest of his miracles. What could be more public than his feeding of the multitude upon the mountain-side? what more unconcealed than his healing of the blind man at the gate of Jericho? Nor must it be alleged that all these things were done only before his friends, who were willing to believe anything about him; for even at the raising of Lazarus there were some present, who, while unable to deny the miracle, were yet so full of enmity toward him, that they went and told the Pharisees; and when the blind man was healed at the gate of the temple, there was a judicial investigation into the case by the rulers of the people. Let any one read the ninth chapter of John's Gospel, and he will be able to judge whether it is likely that the men who could use such means as the rulers employed on that occasion, and were filled with such

bitter hatred toward Jesus as then they manifested, would leave his other miracles unsifted. Whatever else may be said, therefore, about the miraculous works of Jesus, it cannot with truth be alleged that they were done in secret, or that no proper opportunity of inquiring into them was furnished to the world. Now, this is of the greatest importance from its bearing on the value of the testimony given by his followers. For here we have a strong contrast between Jesus and all who have pretended to the possession of supernatural power. The gold plates of which Joseph Smith made so much account could not be shown to Michael Harris,[1] and they have never yet been brought before the gaze of men in public; and even while we write, the land is ringing with the exposure—certainly more vigorous than polite—of those who claimed to do the old rope trick of the conjuror by preternatural agency, while they secretly ensconced themselves behind a closed 'cabinet.' We feel as if it were almost a degradation of our theme to name it in the same

[1] See *The Mormons, or Latter-Day Saints.* London, 1852. P. 22.

breath with these; but still the very contrast will be sufficient to impress on every unprejudiced man, that in the open candour and undisguised publicity with which the miracles of Christ were wrought, there was the fullest opportunity for investigation, so that no one can object to the evidence of his disciples, on the ground that they were denied the means of examining into the character of the works of their Master.

2. *They were competent to judge of them.*—On this point we have already remarked, when replying to Renan's demand for miracles under 'scientific conditions,' and it may be sufficient simply to remind our readers of what we then advanced. Had the works of Jesus been performed on substances with which the disciples were not familiar; had they borne any resemblance to the experiments of the laboratory; or had he in working them used any material agent with whose properties they were not perfectly acquainted,—then their testimony, however valuable it might have been in establishing the fact that Christ did the wonders, would yet have been insufficient to prove that these wonders were true miracles. But in-

stead of this he employs means which are perfectly within the sphere of their knowledge, and produces effects entirely beyond anything which these means themselves would accomplish, so that the proof of a miracle is plain and conclusive. Thus, every man knows quite well what a human touch can do, and what is beyond its power. It does not require a college of philosophers to inform us on that matter, for here one man knows quite as much as another; but Jesus by a touch cleansed the leper, opened the eyes of the blind, and unstopped the ears of the deaf; and hence, when he did so, there is a miracle, on which every man of ordinary discernment is competent to pronounce an opinion. So also we know as much of the properties of earth and the human saliva, as to convince us that, in itself considered, the clay formed by the mixture of the two will be in ordinary circumstances useless as an eye-salve. No medical man, with the least hope of success, would ever employ such a remedy; yet in the case of a man born blind, and well known in the neighbourhood, we have the anointing of his eyes with this preparation, and the washing of it off in a

certain pool, the means of producing a perfect cure. Let these facts, as simple facts, be but well authenticated, and one man is just as good a judge as another of their miraculous character. But to authenticate them we do not require any more than the average intelligence and common sense of men; so that we must not reject the testimony of the disciples, on the allegation that they were incompetent to examine the miracles, and pronounce upon them.

Now, that the disciples do give testimony to these facts, is patent to every one who reads their narratives. This is, indeed, the reason why very many reject their writings; but on what ground is this rejection based? If we cannot believe them, then in their case, as in their Master's, we have a choice between these two alternatives,—either they were the victims of their own credulity, or they were themselves practising on the credulity of others. In plain Saxon phrase, they were either fools or knaves, if they were not trustworthy witnesses.

Can they reasonably be supposed to have been the victims of their own credulity? We have

seen that no secrecy was attempted by Jesus, and that the works themselves were wrought in the plane of their knowledge, and therefore that they were thoroughly competent to judge regarding them, — as much so, indeed, as any common jury among ourselves is to deal with the evidence which is generally submitted to them. Now, with these preliminaries conceded,—and I see not how they can be denied,—it follows that if the disciples were deceived, they must have been the veriest simpletons. But does this accord with the description that is given of their mental endowments? We grant, indeed, that the majority of them were plain, blunt men, of little education, and with no great social position; but we cannot harmonize their character in other respects with the idea that they were such imbeciles as to be easily duped by the pretences of an impostor. They had practical sagacity of the soundest kind; and, as their writings show, they were possessed of intellectual ability of no mean order. Take Peter, for example, and what force of character appears in him! Read his Epistles, and you will be struck with the wisdom of his

counsels and the thoughtfulness of his words; and as you peruse the opening chapters of the Acts of the Apostles, you will not be able to help admiring the earnestness, the acuteness, the power of debate, and skill in the management of difficult matters which he displays. Plainly this is not the type of a man who is easily imposed upon. Let him be what he may, he is no fool. There is about him soundness of judgment and clearness of intellectual perception, coupled with an outspoken honesty of nature which would have revolted against anything like systematic fraud. True, he denied his Lord in the palace of the high priest; but that was under pressure of momentary temptation, and was out of keeping with his entire life, while the bitterness of his after weeping, and the character of his subsequent life, betoken how deeply he repented of his sin. Now this man gives no uncertain testimony on the point before us. Again and again he appeals to the miracles which Jesus did before the multitude, and declares that he was 'a man approved of God among them by miracles, and signs, and wonders, which God did by him in the midst of them.' Nor is this all; when writing in his old

age a letter, which might be valued by men after his decease, he reiterates his assertion, saying, 'We have not followed cunningly devised fables, but were eye-witnesses of his majesty.' Now, we ask, is it likely that a man of this mould could be so imposed upon by a pretender, that he should thus adhere so pertinaciously to the witness which he gives?

But there were others among the disciples with distinctive characteristics as inconsistent with the supposition that they were deceived as any which Peter possessed. What shall we say of such an one as Thomas? Here was a man who would accept of no testimony save that of his own senses, and who would sift for himself every matter to the bottom. Whatever others might be disposed to do, he would not receive anything save on his own personal experience; yet even he was satisfied, and constrained to cry out, 'My Lord, and my God!'

There was Philip too, who, as is evident from his interruption of the valedictory discourse, 'Lord, show us the Father, and it sufficeth us,'[1] had very

[1] John xiv. 8.

much in common with Thomas, and was possessed of an inquisitive mind, not easily satisfied, and not willing to rest in that which he did not clearly comprehend.

There was also the author of the fourth Gospel, who was very far from being intellectually incapable; so far, indeed, that the record he has given taxes the highest minds of our age to understand it, for all so simple as at first it looks. No one can thoughtfully read his pages without seeing the stamp of reality on every one of them, and feeling that he spoke no words of course, but the plain unvarnished truth, when he said,[1] 'That which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life; that which we have seen and heard, declare we unto you.'

Of the other apostles and disciples (with the exception of Paul, who comes behind as one 'born out of due time'), there are too few personal traits given us to enable us to speak with precision regarding them; but surely, concerning those to whom we have referred, there is no plausible

[1] 1 John i. 1, 3.

ground for maintaining the idea that they were deluded simpletons, the victims of a designing impostor. Take their intellectual ability as evinced not only in their writings, but in the effects produced by them upon their age, and then view, in connection with it, the considerations already presented as to the opportunities afforded them for investigation, and the knowledge required to enable them to come to a decision on the subject, and we arrive at but one conclusion,—namely, that these men cannot be viewed as the blindly credulous followers of one by whom they were cunningly deluded.

There remains the other horn of the dilemma, Were they themselves deceivers? Now here, as in the case of their Master, there are moral considerations which render it utterly impossible for us to think them guilty of such baseness. In the first place, there is the uniform good character which they bore. Even their enemies give testimony to the rectitude and blamelessness of their lives. They stood out from among those by whom they were surrounded, as men of truth and purity and excellence. They were

not brought before the judges for 'matters of wrong or wicked lewdness;' they were simple in manners, pure in speech, holy in behaviour, and there was found 'no occasion against them, except it were in the matter' of their Lord. The well-known letter of Pliny to the Emperor Trajan gives an account of the mode of life of the early Christians generally, but of these excellent ones the apostles were the leaders and the best; and if they were impostors, we are asked to believe that a system which even its enemies declare to be the purest the world has ever seen, was founded, and conduct which even their persecutors declared to be irreproachable, was practised by men who yet were systematically and deliberately living a lie. We have no words strong enough to express the revulsion with which we would turn from such a man as Peter, if, after his exposure of the sin of Ananias, such a course could be pursued by him. But it cannot be: the prickly thistle of deceit never yet produced the mellow berries and rich grape clusters of the vine, and never from such a lying root could the fair tree of gospel morality have sprung.

Besides, what conceivable motive could they have had for persevering in this course of deception? From the time of Pentecost forward, all their ideas of earthly glory were abandoned, and they became convinced that the kingdom of Jesus was 'not of this world;' yet from that same date their testimony was of the clearest and most unwavering character. Not riches, nor honour, nor power, nor glory, in a worldly sense, could they expect; but instead, persecution, reproach, and a violent death. Yet 'none of these things moved them;' but they 'took joyfully the spoiling of their goods,' and 'counted not their lives dear unto them,' that they might be Christ's witnesses wherever they went.

Nor is this all: among such a company of deceivers, if they were deceivers, it is inconceivable that no one of them should have turned against the rest, and sought his personal safety by bringing their trickery to view; yet this was never done. The nearest approach to anything of the kind was in the case of Judas; but as one has very quaintly said, 'He was so struck with remorse at

the thought of giving up his lies and becoming an honest man, that he went and hanged himself.'[1] On the whole, then, we may sum up this part of the argument in the words of Dr Hill: 'The history of mankind has not preserved a testimony so complete and satisfactory as that which I have now stated. If, in conformity to the exhibitions which these writings give of their character, you suppose their testimony to be true, then you can give the most natural account of every part of their conduct—of their conversion, their stedfastness, their heroism. But if, notwithstanding every appearance of truth, you suppose their testimony to be false, inexplicable circumstances of glaring absurdity crowd upon you. You must suppose that twelve men of mean birth, of no education, living in that humble station which placed ambitious views out of their reach and far from their thoughts, without any aid from the state, formed the noblest scheme that ever entered into the mind of man, adopted the most daring means of executing that scheme, and conducted it with such address as to conceal the imposture

[1] Lindsay's *Lecture*, as above, p. 30.

under the semblance of simplicity and virtue. You must suppose that men guilty of blasphemy and falsehood, united in an attempt the best contrived, and which has in fact proved the most successful for making the world virtuous; that they formed this singular enterprise without seeking any advantage to themselves, with an avowed contempt of honour and profit, and with the certain expectation of scorn and persecution; that although conscious of one another's villany, none of them ever thought of providing for his own security by disclosing the fraud; but that amidst sufferings the most grievous to flesh and blood, they persevered in their conspiracy to cheat the world into piety, honesty, and benevolence.' 'Truly,' adds the Principal, 'they who can swallow such suppositions, have no title to object to miracles.'[1]

[1] *Lectures in Divinity*, by the late George Hill, D.D., Principal of St Mary's College, St Andrews, vol. i. pp. 47, 48.

III. OBJECTION TO THEIR TESTIMONY ON THE GROUND OF ALLEGED DISCREPANCY BETWEEN THEM.

In opposition to all this, however, it is alleged by the assailants of the miracles, that the statements of the witnesses do not harmonize, but that in their different accounts there are so many discrepancies and contradictions as to destroy entirely the value of their testimony. Thoroughly to answer this objection, we would require to take up and examine every case of alleged inconsistency, and show either that it is possible that the accounts may be all correct, despite their apparent antagonism; or that even if it be impossible for us, with our limited knowledge of the original circumstances, to explain how they are all in harmony, still there is nothing in the existence of such things to warrant our disbelief of the testimony of the evangelists where they thoroughly agree. To do this, however, would require a bulky volume for itself, since it is well known that an objection may be stated in a line which it would require a dissertation to remove. We content ourselves, therefore, with referring to the explanations given in our best

commentaries of the alleged discrepancies, and we merely offer a few general considerations on the whole subject, without seeking to enter into detail.

It is to be remembered, then, that a certain degree of diversity is to be expected in four depositions, which profess to be, and which really are, separate and independent of each other. If you enter into a court of law, and take note of the testimony given by different individuals to the same facts, you will not fail to remark that there are characteristic traits in every deposition. Each witness describes what he saw from his own angle of observation, and in minor details each one expresses himself differently from another; but to the great facts they all, if truthful, bear the most distinct and unequivocal testimony. Now as the evangelists are witnesses of matters of fact, or at least give the statements of those who were witnesses, we may expect similar diversity in their narratives if they be independent and distinct. Had they all agreed in every minute phasis of description, their value as distinct witnesses would have been destroyed, and it might have been said that though they were four in name they were in

reality but one, each repeating like an echo what the other had said. There are here two possibilities: either four narratives alike in everything, and so bearing the marks of collusion and arrangement; or four accounts, as we really have them, with distinctive differences and indications of independence of each other, yet agreeing in the same great and important particulars. Now every one who knows anything of the laws of evidence, will declare that witnesses of the latter character are immensely more valuable and reliable than of the former. Hence the discrepancies, of which so much is made by antagonists, are really unavoidable, if we would have the best and least suspicious kind of testimony. It is here as we have seen it on former occasions, the man who is disposed to find fault will make a fault however it may be. Give him accounts *verbatim et literatim* the same, and *that* will be evidence of designed imposture; give him accounts differing apparently in some minor respects from each other, while yet agreeing substantially, and *that* is made a reason why they should not be believed; but the man of common sense will at once see and admit that

minor discrepancy is always to be expected when we have different and independent witnesses.

Again, it must not be forgotten that the depositions here are in writing, and that we cannot do with a document precisely as we would with a witness whom we are examining *vivâ voce*. There is no doubt a sort of cross-examination made by every good interpreter of Scripture when he submits each separate statement to a rigid analysis, and endeavours to see precisely what it means; but even this, valuable as it has been in removing the appearance of discrepancy on many occasions, is not for a moment to be compared with the advantage for the elucidation of truth, which is furnished by oral examination in the witness-box. We have frequently embraced the opportunity afforded us in an assize town of spending a few hours in a court of justice, and have seen with no little admiration, how, under the guidance of the judge, and by the acuteness of the counsel on both sides, the whole truth has been gradually evolved. Repeatedly have we heard one witness seem to contradict another far more thoroughly than any one of the evangelists appears to contra-

vene another, and yet a question has been put by the bar, or the bench, or the jury, the answer to which has brought out some new fact by which harmony has been restored; or perhaps the former witness has been recalled, and a question put to him which has elicited particulars of which before he had said nothing, and the knowledge of which was all that was needed to explain the difference that had appeared. Now this source of information we cannot have in dealing with the Gospels. Here the record is closed, no new fact can be evolved by cross-examination, and so we are deprived of a great means of throwing light upon the matters in dispute. This is a very important consideration, especially when we take into account the fact, that the great mass of discrepancies which have been heaped together by the labours of objectors, consists of such as arise out of our unacquaintance with the whole circumstances; and the answers to a question or two, like those to which we have referred, would go very far to settle the whole matter in each case. One whose labours in this field gives him a right to speak with some weight, has said, 'that if we

knew the real process of the transactions themselves, that knowledge would enable us to give an account of the diversities of narration and arrangement which the Gospels now present to us.'[1]

Nor must we lose sight of the truth, that with all their appearance of diversity in some details, the gospel writers yet concur in bearing testimony to the great fact that Jesus wrought miracles. About the surroundings of some of them they may seem to vary one from another, but as to the fact that he wrought the miracles they agree; and in these circumstances any unbiassed mind seeking to give an impartial verdict would at once accept their statement as to the matters in which they are at one, reserving his judgment as to those in regard to which they seem to differ. Let it be observed that we are arguing here, not as to the extent of the inspiration claimed for these narratives—that is an after-question: at present we are concerned only with their credibility; and though it would not, we think, be difficult to answer all the objections which might be brought against the

[1] Alford's *Greek Testament*, vol. i., Prolegomena, p. 23.

plenary theory of inspiration from these apparent inconsistencies, yet we may not encumber our argument now with such considerations. We are dealing simply with their credibility; and the position which we here take up is, that since we have found that the witnesses agree in certain great and important matters, among which is the fact that Jesus performed miracles, and since we have seen that the men themselves are both morally and intellectually trustworthy, therefore we may fairly hold as proved the things in which they are in perfect harmony, without waiting to determine what is the precise truth as to those things in which they appear to be at variance. We do not say, observe, that in regard to these last it is in every case impossible precisely to discover what was the true order of occurrences (for in many instances a patient study of the records has led to a solution of the difficulty, though there are others of which all explanation must be mainly conjectural); yet even if this were impossible, we must not allow ourselves on that account to reject the things in which *such* witnesses agree; and in laying down this principle, we feel we would be

supported by the authority of every judge on the bench. There is scarcely a trial of importance on record in which there has not been some particular concerning which there has been difficulty, uncertainty, and discrepancy, and about which it has been felt to be almost impossible to get at the precise truth. Almost every *cause célèbre* has had its mystery, which, in spite of the facilities afforded by cross-examination, has not been thoroughly cleared up; nevertheless, that has not prevented the jury from coming to a verdict on those things in the evidence which were clear. Now, we ask that the testimony of the evangelists shall be treated in the same way, and then we are sure that every intelligent inquirer will give his voice in favour of the reality and genuineness of the miracles of Christ. No more striking illustration of the principle on which we are here insisting can be found than that which is furnished by the case of our Lord's resurrection, and in presenting it to the minds of our readers we gladly avail ourselves of the words of Dean Alford: 'What can be more undoubted and unanimous than the testimony of the evangelists to THE RESURRECTION OF THE

LORD? If there be one fact rather than another of which the apostles were witnesses, *it was this;* and in the concurrent narratives of all four evangelists it stands related beyond all cavil or question. Yet of all the events which they have described, *none is so variously put forth in detail*, or with so many minor discrepancies. And this was just what might have been expected on the principles above laid down. The great fact that the Lord *was risen*—set forth by the ocular witness of the apostles who had seen him—became from that day first in importance in the delivery of their testimony. The *precise order* of his appearances would naturally, from the overwhelming nature of their present emotions, be a matter of minor consequence, and perhaps not even of accurate inquiry till some time had passed. Then, with the utmost desire on the part of the women and apostles to collect the events in the exact order of time, some confusion would be apparent in the history, and some discrepancies in versions of it, which were the results of separate and independent inquiries, the traces of which pervade our present accounts. But what fair-judging student of the

Gospels ever made these variations or discrepancies a ground for doubting the veracity of the evangelists as to the fact of the resurrection, or the principal details of our Lord's appearance after it?'[1] We may not quite agree with the Dean's conjectural theory as to the origination of the variations, but no one who has given attention to the laws of evidence will cavil with the principle on which he proceeds; and we are convinced that if the few real discrepancies (if, indeed, they be real) were looked at in the light in which we have here put them, they would not be felt as any difficulty in the way of the reception of the testimony of the apostles to the miraculous occurrences in the history of our Lord, where it is consentaneous and clear.

[1] Alford's *Greek Testament*, Second Edition, vol. i., Prolegomena, pp. 19, 20.

VI.

THE MYTHICAL THEORY OF STRAUSS.

In opposition to the weighty evidence, a summary of which we have laid before our readers, it has been attempted by some to show that the Gospels originated in such a way as to be perfectly consistent with probability, and with the absence of fraudulent intention on the part of Christ and his apostles, while yet they do not contain a record of actual occurrences. Indeed, the problem to which, in recent years, the antagonists of the supernatural have set themselves, is to account on their principles for the formation of the evangelic narratives. In America, the most conclusive exposure of the imposture practised by Joseph Smith, was the discovery of the fact, that the so-called book of Mormon was in reality an unpublished work of fiction, written by one Solomon Spaulding; and though the idea of wilful impos-

ture is not strongly insisted on by the school of rationalists to which we now allude, their position must be utterly untenable, if they cannot explain the origination of the four Gospels. This has been attempted by many authors, and in many different ways; but the most skilful form in which the effort has been made is that of Strauss, in the work which, after a time of notoriety, is already beginning to be forgotten. More recently, a modification of his view, made, as we shall presently see, at the expense of the moral integrity of Jesus and his followers, has been given to the world by Renan; and though, in the space to which we have restricted ourselves, it will be impossible to track these authors through all the turnings and windings of their ingenious subtlety, yet our treatment of the subject of miracles would be wanting in unity and completeness, if we did not look a little into the attacks made by these authors on the historic verity of the gospel narratives.

We begin with the mythical theory of Strauss, that our readers may the better understand the legendary hypothesis of Renan. A myth, accord-

ing to Strauss, is a religious idea clothed in a historic form. This form may either be a pure fiction, or it may have a nucleus of fact, enlarged and modified by the ideas which have sought through it to find expression. He distinguishes between myths and legends. 'A myth is an idea translated by mental realism into fact: a legend is a group of ideas round a nucleus of fact;'[1] and he endeavours to show that if a small basis of fact, heightened by legend, be allowed in the gospel history, the influence of myth will account for the remainder. In the words of the writer just quoted, 'The idea is regarded as prior to the fact; the need of a deliverer, he pretends, created the idea of a Saviour; the misinterpretation of old prophecy presented conditions which, in the popular mind, must be fulfilled by the Messiah. The gospel history is regarded as the attempt of the idea to realize itself in fact.'[2] Thus viewed, the events of the Saviour's history are

[1] Farrar's *Critical History of Free Thought in reference to the Christian Religion*, p. 380.

[2] *Ibid.* See also *The Essay on Ideology and Subscription*, by Rev. F. C. Coote, M.A., in *Aids to Faith*, p. 155; and a Review of Strauss in the first volume of *The British and Foreign Evangelical Review*, pp. 630, 631.

reduced to the fewest possible number. He was brought up in Nazareth; he was baptized by John; he formed disciples, whom he impressed with his wisdom and goodness; he taught in various districts of Palestine; he proclaimed the Messianic kingdom; he opposed the outwardness of the Pharisees, and provoked their enmity, so that they put him to death upon the cross,—such is the substance of the facts of our Lord's history, which remain after the Gospels have been subjected to the criticism of Strauss; and round these, the ideas and aspirations of the early Christians wove the stories which we find now under the names of the evangelists, imagination lending itself not only to glorify and illustrate, but also in a great degree to create the object of faith. These books are thus not the record of actual facts, but the product of a mental effort to realize and embody the idea which the Jews entertained of their Messiah; and much of their colouring is derived from the Old Testament Scriptures with which they had been so long familiar. Thus the visit of the Magi is suggested by the prophecy of Balaam; the massacre of the

Bethlehem infants corresponds to the destruction of the Hebrew children by Pharaoh; the flight into Egypt has sprung out of the flight of Moses into Midian; the appearance in the temple at the age of twelve has been derived from similar records regarding Samuel and Solomon; the temptation is an embodiment of the idea brought out in the history of Job, that good men are the objects of special hatred to Satan; the transfiguration is another form of the glories of Sinai. These are specimens of the *modus operandi* pursued by this author; his theory being that all this was done, not by any one individual, or with any fraudulent design, but 'that it was a gradual and spontaneous aggregation about the person of Christ of the various types and analogies which the Jews supposed would be realized in the Messiah.'[1] To this source of the narratives there falls to be added the legendary portion, derived from the influence of the personal character of Jesus; and these together, he contends, serve to account for the documents as they are now in our possession. We have thus a kind of historical

[1] *British and Foreign Evangelical Review*, as above.

reproduction of the famous nebular hypothesis; but we need only to apply to it the test of rigid analysis, and we shall see it fade away as did its scientific prototype before the telescope of Lord Rosse; for there are many objections to it, each of which is fatal.

In particular, this theory is altogether inconsistent with the generally received date of the four Gospels. Myths, as Dr Strauss defines them, are necessarily of slow growth, and are the product of many years. Indeed, in regard to the mythologies of Greece and Rome, every one knows that the origin of the fables of which they are composed is lost in the prehistoric ages; and if the Gospels are to be reduced to a level with them, we naturally expect that the same thing will be true in their case. Instead of this, however, we find that these narratives were written, as all evidence goes to establish, before the close of the first century, and some of them in the early part of the latter half of that century; so that we have a space of little more than thirty years allowed for the aggregation of those so-called fictions round the small nucleus of admitted

facts which they contain. That is to say, applying the same test to our own times, we are asked to believe that it is possible that events which occurred in the year 1829, many of the chief actors in which still survive, may in the present day have become amalgamated with mythical fables, through which the people of this country desire to express certain of their own preconceived ideas. Nay, we may put the case still more strongly; for in these days of steam and electricity, events of which the historian must take cognizance, succeed each other so much more rapidly than in former ages, that what used to be enough for the history of half a century, is now crushed into little more than a fifth of the time. We may therefore declare, that the mythical hypothesis of Strauss is tantamount to an affirmation that the occurrences of 1848, the year of political earthquakes all over Europe, have already gathered round them a *nebula* of fable, and were in reality very different from the shape which they have now assumed in the idea of the multitude; or, to take a particular illustration, that the election of Louis Napoleon as President of the French Republic is as much a myth as is the

story that Romulus and Remus were suckled by a wolf.

To get rid of this fatal objection to his theory, Strauss, with a cool contempt for all historical evidence, has fixed the date of the Gospels about the middle of the second century after Christ; but independently of the consideration that even that date, late as it is, does not appreciably lessen the difficulty which must be felt by any one who seeks to show how, within such a period, myths could be formed into a shape so beautiful and complete as these Gospels are, there is the most convincing proof, as any one may see by consulting works on the canon, that the Gospels were written long before the time at which he arbitrarily dates them. Even Renan acknowledges that they belong to the first century; and the fact that he cannot get over this well-established position, may be the reason why, for the myths of Strauss, he has preferred his own legends. But we are not yet dealing with him, and go back again to Strauss, who admits the genuineness, at least of the main parts, of four of Paul's Epistles. This admission, however, meagre

as it is, is fatal to his whole hypothesis; for if you give us a *pou sto*[1] on anything of Paul's, it will not be difficult to demolish all such visionary views, —since the letters presuppose the man, and the man cannot be seen without the fact of his conversion being recognised; and the fact of his conversion cannot be explained, save on the ground of the reality of the resurrection of Christ; and the resurrection of Christ being admitted, there is no longer any room for argument.

It is true, indeed, that Strauss, pressed in this matter of time, bolsters up his theory by saying that the myths were already to a large extent made to hand in the Old Testament, and that the Jews only transferred their ideas of the Messiah to Jesus. But to this it can be replied, that the notion of the Messiah, as commonly held by the Jews of the Saviour's day, was very different from, was in many respects precisely the opposite of, that which was realized in Jesus, so that it is palpably absurd to suppose that they clothed his history with the dress of their own imagination. Besides,

[1] 'Who learns the one Pou sto, whence after hands may move the world.'—Tennyson's *Princess*.

the Christ of the Gospels was rejected by the Jews, and his followers latterly were mainly of the Gentiles. By the time the Gospels were written, the Gentiles formed a large proportion of the entire Church; and who that thinks of the circumcision controversy, and the heart-burning which it created, can suppose that the non-Jewish portion of the new community would be content to receive the ready-made ideas of the Jews as to their Messiah? Taking into consideration the Gentile elements in the Church therefore, the attempt to trace the Gospel narratives to mere Jewish idealism must be pronounced a failure.

But further, how on such a supposition are we to account for the origin and success of the Christian Church? On the view of Strauss, Christ is the creation of the Church, and not the Church founded upon Christ. But whence came the Church itself? The existence of this society, and its great and astonishing success during the latter part of the first century, are among the best attested facts in ancient history; but how did it originate? The ordinary believer traces its origin to the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

And on this view of the matter all is plain; for in these things, viewed as facts, you have a cause adequate to the production of the effect. But Strauss reverses all this, and ascribes the creation of the stories concerning Jesus to the Church itself. Hence there is no account given of the beginning of that remarkable institution. Herein surely is a marvellous thing,—that a religion, the grandest and noblest which the world has ever seen, should rise in an age unequalled by any before it for enlightenment and philosophy, and should march in peaceful progress over the wide world, and that after all there should be no way of accounting for its beginning! In the case of Islamism, which rose in an era not to be compared with that which was glorified by the advent of the Messiah, we have no such difficulty. Why, then, should there be perplexity here? The theory of Strauss, fairly carried out, would make Christianity self-produced; but who can accept of such an explanation of its appearance? Admit these narratives to be authentic and credible records of real occurrences, and you have a clear explanation of the most marvellous fact in history: declare them to be

myths, and you leave unaccounted for a movement of the grandest and most glorious character; nay, you are reduced to the necessity of believing, that in an age of the greatest civilisation to which men without the gospel have reached,—an age, too, abounding in records of contemporaneous events,—a movement began, and made immense progress in all parts of the known world, while yet we can have no more certainty of the real truth as to its beginning, than we have of the early history of Greece from the fables of its mythology.

We have spoken of the age in which Christ appeared in one connection; it cannot surely be necessary for us to insist, as a further objection, on the unsuitableness of such an era for the formation of myths. The time which found its representative man, among the Romans, in Pilate, that prince of trimmers, with his sneering question, 'What is truth?' and, among the Jews, in the sceptic Sadducee, with his denial of spirit, and the haughty Pharisee, with his broad phylactery and hollow heart, was not surely a fitting season for the *spontaneous generation* of such beautiful stories, even if they were only myths, as those

which we have here preserved to us in the pure amber of the gospel narrative. Water cannot rise above its level; and that which is the product of the ideas of an age, cannot transcend the age itself. Here, however, we have a history which stands out and above not that age alone, but every era of human history. Surely the conclusion must be inevitable, that it had a superhuman source. We cannot believe that by any '*natural selection*' of existing varieties and modes of thought, this *new species* of truth could have been thus '*developed*.' The Darwinian hypothesis is as improbable when applied thus to history as it is in other departments. Nothing short of a fresh creation can account for such a glorious character as that which is limned for us by the hands of the four evangelists; and in any case we may be sure, that the age which crucified Jesus for being what he was, never could have developed out of itself the story of his life.

More than this, the manner in which the evangelic narratives are dealt with by Strauss is evermore landing him in palpable absurdities and contradictions. He denies the authenticity of the

Gospels, and yet when it serves his purpose he refers to them as if they were of the most credible character. He takes what suits his need, and complacently ignores the rest, or coolly says, It is evidently mythical. At one time he regards the narratives of the Gospels as the result of a very simple process, going on almost imperceptibly, and without any fraudulent intention, in the minds of thousands at once; at another, when perhaps he is dealing with some details, he assumes a degree of reflection and study on the part of the originators of the stories, in their harmonizing of the character of Jesus with its ideal, which is perfectly inconsistent with the absence of design. In looking at the mode in which he accounts for some of the portions of these books, and contemplating the transcendental mysticism of the philosophy on which he represents the first Christians as acting in their formation, we are tempted to say, in the caustic words of Dr Alexander, 'Is it indeed true that through this "palpable obscure" of speculation, these simple-minded children of an all-believing uncritical age walked with a firm step and an open eye? Is it indeed true that the deep

philosophy of Hegel was embodied by the early Christians in their conception of Jesus? Was Teutonic science anticipated by childish simplicity? If so, we are forced upon one of two conclusions: Either the early Christians were not such credulous children as Dr Strauss represents, or Teutonic philosophy is but a child's dream after all.'[1]

We only add, that the method of Strauss, if rigidly applied to other records, would make all history impossible. He starts with a foregone conclusion: everything consistent, or which with a little manipulation can be made consistent, with that, he retains, and all else, on one pretence or another, he rejects. He is not sparing of dogmatism, and has at his command a whole corps of reserve resources to which in times of perplexity he betakes himself. He sets forth in imposing array the whole list of discrepancies, real or imaginary, which the Gospels contain, and works wonders by the mere 'silence' of Josephus and other writers. But who does not see that on such

[1] *Christ and Christianity*, p. 117. The section of Dr Alexander's book which deals with Strauss is the most searching, trenchant, and scathing exposure of the mythical theory which has appeared among us.

principles all history may be rendered mythical?[1] With a very little ingenuity, one might, after the example of Strauss, show most conclusively that the late Danish war never occurred, but is a purely mythical thing; while yet the bleeding, panting victim lies before the eye of Europe, and the haughty conquerors swagger over their success, or quarrel about the division of the prey.

But enough has been said to show the falsity of the principle on which the work of Strauss is based, and there is the less reason to dwell upon it, that even by rationalists themselves it is now to a large extent discarded. Recently, indeed, Strauss has reissued his work in what he means to be a people's edition; but as this newest form of his production has not yet reached our hands in an English dress, we are unable to speak positively regarding it. One who is well qualified to express an opinion has said: 'He still absolves Jesus from deception, ascribing the parts of the narrative which, if historical, would involve it, to the mis-

[1] Examples of this may be seen in Beard's *Voices of the Church*, in reply to Strauss; also in *The Eclipse of Faith*, in the paper headed 'The Papal Aggression Impossible,' p. 340.

representation of the evangelists; but it is no longer invariably unconscious, though often so, and thus *the mythical theory, properly so called, is at an end.*'[1] Still an understanding of its nature, and of the manner in which it is to be met, was needful to a proper comprehension of the position which has been taken up by Renan, to whose view we shall now seek to devote a little attention.

[1] *False Christs and the True*, by Dr Cairns, p. 6, note.

VII.

THE LEGENDARY THEORY OF RENAN.

This writer differs from Strauss in preferring the legendary to the mythical in the source of the Gospels; and instead of setting himself to the work of critical destruction alone, he has, by the aid of a vivid imagination, attempted to build up a Life of Jesus, 'which shall constitute a logical, probable, harmonious narrative throughout,' while yet all that is miraculous is unceremoniously excluded. Whether he has succeeded in this will perhaps appear as we advance; but we shall seek to make plain the method on which he proceeds, premising that many of the objections already brought against the mythical theory, especially those which have regard to the age in which Christ appeared, and the inconsistencies involved in such a treatment of the narratives, apply with as much force to the legendary. The germ of his book is

to be found in a passage of an earlier work,[1] in which, speaking of the theory of Strauss, he says, 'It is not without many restrictions that the denomination of myths can be employed in treating of the gospel narratives. I would prefer for my part the word legends or legendary stories, which, while giving large scope for the operation of popular opinion, allows the action and personal influence of Jesus to remain entire.' In the Introduction to his work he has given, with considerable fulness, his views as to the origin of the Gospels, and he has devoted one of his chapters to an unfolding of the manner in which the legendary stories involving miracles were produced. We shall glance shortly at each of these, restricting ourselves in our criticism to those objections which, without involving any recondite lore, are best calculated to show the falseness of his opinions, and we greatly mistake if the account which he presents to us do not clearly appear to be anything but 'probable, logical, and harmonious throughout.'

[1] Quoted by Rev. J. B. Paton, M.A., in his sifting Review of Renan, reprinted from the *London Quarterly*, p. 117.

As we have already incidentally observed, he has, yielding to the force of incontrovertible evidence, fixed the date of the completion of the Gospels before the end of the first century. Beginning with that of Luke, he says regarding it, that 'doubt is scarcely possible.'[1] He admits that its author is the same as that of the Acts of the Apostles, and that its date is only a short time after the destruction of Jerusalem; adding, 'We are here, then, upon solid ground, for we are concerned with a work written entirely by the same hand, and with the most perfect unity.' When we inquire on what ground the date of this Gospel is placed after the destruction of Jerusalem, we are referred in the footnote to the passage containing the prophecy of that event; and the reasoning implied, though not expressed, is that because that prediction is there, the book in which it is found could not have been written till after the event. But apart from the dogmatic assumption involved in such a mode of procedure, how does this date harmonize with the admission that the Gospel was written by the author of the Acts?

[1] *Life of Jesus*, p. 9.

In the beginning of the latter book it is shown that the Gospel had been already written; but the Acts, as is clear from their closing chapters, were finished during the imprisonment of Paul, which is placed by no one later than A.D. 65. Hence the admission that the Gospel was written by the author of the Acts, leads us to the conclusion that it was finished before the year A.D. 65, and therefore some years *before* the destruction of Jerusalem. But leaving that, let us show our readers how M. Renan moves over the 'solid' ground of this third Gospel. In another part of his Introduction, removed by a few pages from the passage to which we have referred, and when the reader may have forgotten the admissions made, we come upon the following: 'The historical value of Luke's work is sensibly weaker [than that of Mark]. It is a document which comes to us second-hand. . . . Some sentences are distorted and exaggerated. . . . He subdues some details in order to make the different narratives agree: he softens the passages which had become embarrassing on account of a more exalted idea of the divinity of Christ: he exaggerates the marvellous, commits errors in chronology:

we feel we have to do with a compiler, with a man who has not himself seen the witnesses, but who labours at the texts, and wrests their sense to make them agree: he interprets the documents according to his own idea.'[1] Now if this be solid ground, we wonder what our author's idea of a marshy quagmire is; and we should like to see by what process these two views of Luke's Gospel can be made harmonious. Nor is it better when we look below the surface, and ask on what grounds all these assertions are made. There is of course a long array of proof texts in the notes, but they have very frequently no bearing on the assertion which they are intended to support; and those that have a reference to the subject, are given precisely as if no other view could be taken of them than that which he wishes to be received. Thus, in proof that Luke exaggerates the marvellous, we are directed to chap. iv. 14: 'And Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit into Galilee; and there went out a fame of him through all the region round about.' But what is there peculiar to the third evangelist here that he

[1] Pp. 22, 23.

should be placed beneath the others on account of it? and when in the matter of chronology he refers to the decree of the taxing, we are tempted to ask if he has never seen any of the explanations of the difficulty which it presents, that he should so complacently ignore them all. This is not criticism, it is dogmatism; and as in the case of Strauss, so here we may remark, that on such principles as these no historic document, even the most recent and authentic, could escape.

But it is not better with the other evangelists. Here is his account of the first two Gospels. They are 'impersonal compositions, in which the author totally disappears. That which appears most likely is, that we have not the entirely original compilations of either Matthew or Mark, but that our first two Gospels are versions in which the attempt is made to fill up the gaps of the one text by the other. Every one wished in fact to possess a complete copy. He who had in his copy only discourses, wished to have narratives, and *vice versa*. It is thus that the Gospel according to Matthew is found to have included almost all the anecdotes of Mark; and that the Gospel

according to Mark now contains numerous features which came from the *Logia* of Matthew. There was no scruple in inserting additions, in variously combining them, and in completing some by others. The poor man who has but one book, wishes that it may contain all that is dear to his heart. These little books were lent: each one transcribed in the margin of his copy the words and the parables he found elsewhere which touched him. The most beautiful thing in the world has thus proceeded from an obscure and purely popular elaboration.'[1] It is moreover 'certain that the third Gospel is posterior to the first two.'[2] Hence, on our author's own showing, we must place the date of these two productions before a period very shortly subsequent to the destruction of Jerusalem; and as he says that the Gospel of Luke 'exhibits the character of a much more advanced compilation,' we shall, in his view, be compelled to place them a considerable time before it,—say at the least ten years,—so that we have allowed to us about thirty years for the purely 'popular elaboration' of which he has spoken.

[1] *Life of Jesus*, Introduction, pp. 9, 10, 11, 12. [2] *Ibid.* p. 9.

But waiving the force of this consideration, how utterly impossible is this whole theory! M. Renan forgets that he has to do with documents which were not simply private possessions, but the public property of the Church: hence, however possible it might have been for the poor man with his one book to have added on the margin of his own copy incidents which interested him, the thing which is to be accounted for is the public reception of these two separate books in their present form by the Church; and we boldly say that on his principles it is impossible to explain this. Suppose it had been as he has imagined in the passages which we have quoted, then what must have been the issue? Clearly, either one great aggregate agglomeration of the two Gospels, in which what was Matthew's and what was Mark's would be indistinguishable, or an endless number of separate compilations, each formed according to the taste of the compiler, and consisting of the portions which 'touched him' most tenderly. But instead, we have two books bearing very clear marks of separate individuality. Now, how did this happen? How were the texts of these

two narratives so fixed that the various readings, numerous though they be, are so small in importance as to be scarcely appreciable? Taking one original text in each case as the standard of each Gospel, we can naturally explain the manuscript variations by the process of transcription; but if with Renan we hold that the two were formed by a kind of 'fortuitous concourse' of narratives, or historical chance-medley, then we shall find it impossible to account for the fact, that from the earliest age of the Church they existed very much as we have them now.

But improbable as this theory regarding the Gospels of Matthew and Mark is on the very face of it, the difficulties increase upon us when we look into the books themselves, and take note of their contents, for then we are struck with the marks of individuality which they present. Mr Paton, in his reply to Renan, has brought before his readers a summary of those things which are distinctive of Matthew: we shall therefore restrict ourselves here to the consideration of the peculiarities of Mark, the rather as it is too generally taken for granted that the second Gospel is but

an epitome of the first. Absolutely shorter than that of Matthew, it will yet be found that the narrative of Mark is in many instances more full, detailed, and explicit than that of his brother evangelist; and every one who has given himself to the study of gospel harmony knows, that very frequently the element that is needed to explain the apparent discrepancy between the others is supplied by Mark. In particular, his Gospel is distinguished by the graphic portraiture of events in the present tense. He places the whole circumstances before his readers' eyes, and with his often recurring 'straightway,'[1] there is a vivid distinctness given to each occurrence. Then we find that more attention is bestowed by him on the works of Jesus than on his words, so that we have comparatively few of the Lord's discourses preserved in his chapters. This circumstance is fatal to the theory we are considering; for if those who had a record of the works wished one of the discourses, and *vice versa*, then how comes it that so few discourses are in Mark? As one has very well

[1] Εὐθέως, εὐθύς. These two terms taken together occur no fewer than forty-one times in the second Gospel.

remarked here: 'Mark is silent on the greatest of these discourses which Matthew records. What were the persons about who wished to have a complete copy out of the two, and yet forgot to adopt the Sermon on the Mount? Two very small books, subjected to this process of active assimilation, still show marks of independence in every chapter, and the background of resemblances throws out the differences into stronger relief. Had the object been to produce one Gospel out of two, any unskilful hand, used freely for a couple of days, would have produced a more successful result than a whole community, working as M. Renan supposes, has done.'[1] But more minute individualisms even than those which we have noted appear in Mark; for to him it is that we are mainly indebted for the information we have regarding our Lord's looks, gestures, and feelings. It is he who tells us that 'he looked round upon his accusers with anger, being grieved for the hardness of their hearts.'[2] To him we owe the statement that he was 'much displeased' with the disciples for commanding away

[1] *North British Review*, No. 79, pp. 189, 190. [2] Mark iii. 5.

the children from him.[1] He speaks of his look of love directed to his spiritual children;[2] his look of reproof on the disciples as a whole, and specially on Peter;[3] his beholding in love the young man who came to him;[4] his looking round about upon his disciples in the enforcement of his words.[5] So, too, regarding the incidents in the career of Peter, with whom Mark is generally connected, a similar individuality appears, bringing out a modesty of nature which we do not commonly associate with that apostle, but in which we recognise how much the grace of God had subdued the inherent forwardness of the man. There is the absence of reference to the honours which Christ bestowed upon him, and of which the others have spoken. No mention is made of the gift of the keys, or of the walking on the waves, or of the feet-washing, or of the scene by the sea of Galilee; while, on the other hand, the reproof given him by the Lord immediately after his promise about the keys is inserted, and we have furnished to us a full and particular account of

[1] Mark x. 14. [2] Chap. iii. 34. [3] Chap. viii. 33.
[4] Chap. x. 21. [5] Chap. x. 23–27.

the details of his denial of his Master. Only in one instance does there seem to be a departure from this rule, which the author appears to have studiously followed, and that is when, after Christ's resurrection, the command is given, 'Go, tell my disciples and Peter;' but even this is no exception, for it is there as a mark of the divine condescension and generous love of Jesus to him even after his thrice repeated sin, and is inserted not to do honour to Peter, but to give glory to his Lord. On the whole, then, we may allege that the distinctive characteristics of this Gospel are too strongly marked to admit of our reception of any such theory in regard to its origin as that which Renan has propounded; and we may leave the matter to the judgment of our readers, merely quoting the remarks of a recent commentator in regard to this very precious, but we fear too greatly neglected book:—'What strikes every one is, that though the briefest of all the Gospels, this is, in some of the principal scenes of our Lord's history, the fullest. But what is not so obvious is, that wherever the finer and subtler feelings of humanity, or

the deeper and more peculiar hues of our Lord's character were brought out, these, though they should be lightly passed over by all the other evangelists, are sure to be found here, and in touches of such quiet delicacy and power, that, though scarcely observed by the cursory reader, they leave indelible impressions upon all the thoughtful, and furnish a key to much that is in the other Gospels.'[1]

Our author does not succeed better with the Gospel of John, and gives us anything but a probable account of its formation. Recognising, as every intelligent reader must, the intense individuality of this evangelist, and the difference between him and the rest, he yet endeavours unduly to magnify it, and seeks to show that the view which he gives of Christ is altogether inconsistent with that furnished by the synoptics. In doing this, he speaks of the beloved disciple in a

[1] *Commentary, Critical, Experimental, and Practical, on the Old and New Testaments*, vol. v., Matthew to John, by Dr David Brown; under Mark i. The reader who desires to prosecute this subject, as far as the Gospel of Mark is concerned, will do well to consult an excellent article upon it in the *London Quarterly Review*, No. 46, January 1865. See also the portion of Lange's *Commentary* which treats of the characteristics of this evangelist.

manner that must be repugnant to every spiritual mind. Here are some of his words: 'We are tempted to believe that John in his old age having read the gospel narratives, on the one hand remarked their various inaccuracies, and on the other was hurt at seeing that there was not accorded to him a sufficiently high place in the history of Christ; that then he commenced to dictate a number of things which he knew better than the rest, with the intention of showing that in many instances in which only Peter was spoken of, he had figured with him, and even before him.'[1] And again, 'We see, in the disorder of the compilation, the irregularity of the narrative, the disjointedness of the first chapters, the remembrances of an old man, sometimes of remarkable freshness, sometimes having undergone strange modifications.'[2] Yet though the discourses of Jesus given by him are 'not historical, but compositions intended to convey with the authority of Jesus certain doctrines dear to the compiler,' we are afterwards told that 'every one who sets himself to write the

[1] *Life of Jesus*, English Translation, as before, pp. 15, 16.
[2] *Ibid.* p. 16.

Life of Jesus without any predetermined theory as to the relative value of the Gospels, letting himself be guided solely by the sentiment of the subject, will be led in numerous instances to prefer the narrative of John to that of the synoptics.'[1] Now such a treatment of the fourth Gospel is most unfair, and every reader will see that it is inconsistent with itself, while at the same time it gives an account of its origin that is on every side inconceivable. What! John jealous of Peter, so that the divinest book in the world had its origin in the personal pique and petty pride of its author! Who can believe this of a man who throughout his record has never named his own name, and has kept himself studiously in the background? Who can believe this of him who was the apostle of brotherhood, and who in his last days, when this book was written, was in the habit of repeating his well-known exhortation, 'Little children love one another'? Think of the venerable old man of Ephesus preaching thus to the people, and yet all the while inwardly fretting and chafing because Peter was preferred before him by the other evan-

[1] *Life of Jesus*, English Translation, as before, p. 19.

gelists! The moral impossibility of this seems never to have been dreamed of by the ingenious and sentimental Frenchman. But it is not true that the other evangelists have exalted Peter at the expense of John. Even in the Gospel of Mark, which, as all allow, was Petrine in its origin, there is no trace of this; rather, as we have seen, does Peter modestly keep himself out of view as much as possible, and especially when any honour is conferred upon him; so that the idea of jealousy in the heart of John toward his brother Peter has no foundation whatever in the narratives, and is wholly the creature of Renan's fertile imagination.

But let us see the inconsistency of his view with itself, and with the contents of the book. How can that be a disjointed narrative, which, as all allow, gives us the key to the chronology of the Saviour's life, and to which in this very department our author confesses himself indebted? and there cannot surely be much disorder marking a compilation which, from beginning to end, is devoted to the proof of one great thesis, which the author never allows us to forget. Never, though the external forms of logic be wanting, was there

a more masterly marshalling of arguments in favour of any conclusion than there is in the Gospel of John, for each portion of the narrative converges toward the great point at the close: 'These are written that ye may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.' Indeed, the person of Christ—as revealed through his character, his actions, and his words—is the grand theme of the fourth evangelist; and every thoughtful reader will see that each chapter has its own part in the elaboration of this great argument. In the first he is the Lamb of God; in the second, the temple; in the third, the glorious antitype to the brazen serpent; in the fourth, the water of life; in the fifth, the judge of all; in the sixth, the bread of life; in the seventh, he is again the water of life; in the eighth and ninth, the light of the world; in the tenth, the good shepherd; in the eleventh, the resurrection and the life; in the twelfth, the King of Zion; in the thirteenth, the perfect example; in the fourteenth, the way, the truth, and the life; in the fifteenth, the true vine; in the sixteenth, the precursor of the Paraclete; in the seventeenth, the priestly intercessor; in the eighteenth and

nineteenth, the willing victim; and in the twentieth again, the resurrection and the life. Take these divine I AMS, in which this Gospel abounds; let them be set in order thus, and then, instead of a chaotic compilation, we have a compact and well-built argument, the method of which is only hidden beneath the awful importance of the truths which come incidentally into view. But enough: before such a presentation of the fourth Gospel, the theory of Renan appears to be not only untrue to fact, but also the most heartless mockery of our most sacred things; and we cannot think of his treatment of this, the innermost sanctuary of the New Testament, without recalling to mind the conduct of that blaspheming king, who set up the statue of Jupiter in the holy of holies, where once the glory of the Shechinah hovered above the mercy-seat. But we need not be surprised that the man who has not scrupled to charge Jesus with deception, should have a buffet for the cheek of John.

It is time, however, having shown the improbability—nay, we will say the impossibility—of his theory of the origination of the Gospels as

a whole, that we should proceed to speak of the manner in which he accounts for the legendary stories into which he resolves all the narratives of the miraculous. We shall best describe it in his own words: 'The legends about him were the fruit of a great and entirely spontaneous conspiracy, and were developed around him during his lifetime. The title, Son of David, was the first which he accepted, probably without being concerned in the innocent frauds by which it was sought to secure it unto him. He allowed a title to be given him, without which he could not hope for success. He ended, it seems, by taking pleasure therein, for he performed most willingly the miracles which were asked of him (*N.B.*— By miracles here he means tricks, or what he calls below illusions, acts of folly) by those who used this title in addressing him.'[1] 'As to miracles, they were regarded at this period as an indispensable mark of the divine, and as the sign of the prophetic vocation. Jesus was therefore obliged to choose between two alternatives: either to renounce his mission, or to become a thaumaturgus.'[2] 'It

[1] *Life of Jesus*, as before, p. 178. [2] *Ibid.* p. 189.

is probable that the hearers of Jesus were more struck by his miracles than by his eminently divine discourses. Let us add, that doubtless popular rumour, both before and after the death of Jesus, exaggerated enormously the number of occurrences of this kind.'[1] 'We will admit, then, without hesitation, that acts which would now be considered as acts of illusion or folly, held a large place in the life of Jesus.'[2] 'We must remember that every idea loses something of its purity as soon as it aspires to realize itself. Success is never attained without some injury being done to the sensibility of the soul. Such is the feebleness of the human mind, that the best causes are ofttimes gained by the worst arguments.'[3] 'Nothing great has been established that does not rest upon a legend. The only culprit in such cases is the humanity which is willing to be deceived.'[4] 'History is impossible if we do not fully admit that there are many standards of sincerity. All great things are done through the people; now we can only lead the people by adapting ourselves to

[1] *Life of Jesus*, as before, p. 190. [2] P. 195.
[3] P. 190. [4] P 187.

its ideas. The philosopher who, knowing this, isolates and fortifies himself in his integrity, is highly praiseworthy; but he who takes humanity with its illusions, and seeks to act with it and upon it, cannot be blamed. It is easy for us who are so powerless to call this falsehood; when we have effected by our scruples what they accomplished by their falsehood, we shall have a right to be severe upon them.'[1]

We have grouped these quotations together, that our readers may have at one view the substance of what this author has written on the rise and growth of the stories which he calls legendary; and we may almost leave them to pronounce judgment, how far a process such as that which he has described, can be called an 'entirely spontaneous conspiracy,' and how far the result of it can be regarded as 'logical, probable, and harmonious throughout.' We do not dwell now on such considerations as those which we have already presented in treating of the theory of Strauss, but would call attention to these two things: first, this view is inconsistent with itself; and second,

[1] *Life of Jesus*, as before, p. 187.

it involves all those moral incongruities which we have already seen to be inseparable from the opinion that Jesus was in any sense of the word a deceiver.

First, It is inconsistent with itself. When we ask the question, how Jesus came to be called the Son of David, this author tells us, he allowed a title to be given him without which he could not look for success; and when we inquire how he came to have miracles associated with him, the answer is, he professed to work them, because without this he could not have been received as the Messiah, one of whose well-known appellations was the 'Son of David.' Now, let us analyse these statements. When were these miracles wrought by Jesus? They must have been performed either before or after he was received as the Messiah. If before, then it could not be said that he merely allowed himself to be called by a name, to obtain which was the very purpose for which the miracles, as Renan understands miracles, were wrought by him; if after, then he did not need to work them in order to be received as the Messiah, for he was already so recognised. If Jesus had

the title in a manner forced upon him, he could not have wrought miracles with the view of getting it; if he wrought miracles with the object of being received as the Messiah, then when he was so received, he could not be said merely to allow himself to be so called.

But in the second place, this view involves all the moral incongruities which we have seen are inseparable from the opinion that Jesus was in any sense of the word a deceiver. For a deceiver Jesus was if this account is true, and the miracles are degraded to mere acts of illusion, performed for the purpose of substantiating a claim to which he had no shadow of title. Renan, indeed, attempts to vindicate him for his imposture, by a species of casuistry; but his vindication is a failure. True, he says that 'a mere sorcerer, after the manner of Simon the magician, could not have brought about a moral revolution like that effected by Jesus;' but the question here is, Could the author of a moral revolution, like that effected by Jesus, employ such immoral means as that of palming himself upon the people as a worker of real miracles, while he was only a thaumaturgus, that

is, a performer of acts of illusion and folly? Thus are we brought back to the point at which our former argument broke off: either Jesus was a deceiver, and knowingly passed off as miracles what were only feats of legerdemain, and so we are beset with all the moral difficulties on which there we have enlarged; or he was the Truth, and his miracles were genuine. To the character of Jesus himself, and the influence of the system which he introduced, this, like all our other modern religious controversies, narrows in; and so far as the subject of the miracles is concerned, we shrink not from the issue; for if that pure and holy character be sullied, the miracles are not worth the keeping, while if that be retained spotless, the miracles will present no difficulty, since the character of Christ is itself the grandest miracle the world has ever seen. Not from a root of deception could such a goodly tree, bearing on its branches twelve manner of fruits, and whose leaves are for the healing of the nations, spring; and we may well say with a recent reviewer, 'If falsehood about the holiest things is so blessed with fruit that is not false, then surely there is

no such divine rule of truth and justice over the world as we had supposed; and grapes may blossom upon the thorns, and figs be sought among the thistles. God blesses alike the truth and the lie; and the record of eighteen centuries of church history is the account of the exuberant vitality of a pious fraud at best, and at worst of simple fraud and falsehood. From the edge of this precipice even the non-Christian world try to struggle backwards. This moral earthquake, where an underlying falsehood shakes all the firm ground of truth, which we thought solid to the axis, we can only think upon with horror.'[1]

[1] *North British Review*, No. 79, p. 208.

VIII.

THE EVIDENTIAL VALUE OF MIRACLES.

THE removal of the objections which have been raised against the possibility and credibility of miracles, and the attempt to show that the origin of the documents which contain the records of these wondrous works cannot be satisfactorily explained, unless we admit that they are the histories of real occurrences, have prepared the way for our entering now upon the question, What do the miracles themselves prove? What conclusion are we warranted to draw regarding Christ and his apostles from the fact that they wrought supernatural works? And if we were right in our definition of a miracle at the outset, this question need not detain us long. We said that they were works out of the usual course of natural occurrences, and produced by the intervention of the power of God. Hence if they be performed

through the instrumentality of one who claims to be a messenger from God, they are the divine authentication and confirmation of that claim. They are God's attestation of the commission presented by him who represents himself as being God's messenger to men. They are his credentials as the legate of God; and as an inference from them, we are prepared to receive his words as the message of God. Nicodemus was not wrong, therefore, when he came to Jesus seeking divine truth, and saying, 'We know that thou art a teacher come from God, for no man can do these miracles which thou doest except God be with him.' It has often been said, indeed, that power cannot in the nature of things confirm truth; but that all depends on whose power it is. Now in this instance it is the power of God, and the moral excellence of Deity gives its weight to the forthputting of that power in attestation of the claims made by him through whose instrumentality, or rather perhaps at whose word, the miracle is wrought. The name at the bottom of the letter does not in itself give me a guarantee for the truth of the contents of the epistle: for

that I must fall back upon the character of him whose name it is; and in like manner the power of the miracle *per se* does not assure me either of the divinity of the claims put forth, or of the authority of the doctrines taught by the miracle-worker: for that I must fall back upon the character of him whose power performed the supernatural work; and considering that he is God, I may be well assured that he would not affix the seal of his confirmation to anything that is false, or sanction a claim to speak in his name which was not well founded.

Thus viewed, miracles are the outward and visible confirmation by supernatural agency of a claim to the possession of an inward commission equally supernatural, but lying in a region which is not so patent to our observation as the other. The prophet declares that he speaks in God's name and by divine inspiration; that is to say, he affirms that there is what in the present connection we may call a spiritual and intellectual miracle being wrought within him, by virtue of which he speaks to us the truth of God; but the reality of this mental miracle we have not the means of directly

testing, and so it is confirmed by another supernatural work, lying in the department of external nature, which we can see and determine for ourselves.

In illustration of this mode of putting the case, we may refer here to the case of the paralytic, as that is related in the gospel narrative. We are told that when Jesus saw the faith of the poor man and his bearers, he said unto him,[1] 'Son, thy sins be forgiven thee. But there were certain of the scribes sitting there, and reasoning in their hearts, Why doth this man thus speak blasphemies? who can forgive sins but God only? And immediately, when Jesus perceived in his spirit that they so reasoned within themselves, he said unto them, Why reason ye these things in your hearts? Whether is it easier to say to the sick of the palsy, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Arise, and take up thy bed, and walk? But that ye may know that the Son of Man hath power on earth to forgive sins (he saith to the sick of the palsy), I say unto thee, Arise, and take up thy bed, and go thy way into thine house. And

[1] Mark ii. 5–11.

immediately he arose, took up the bed, and went forth before them all; insomuch that they were all amazed, and glorified God, saying, We never saw it on this fashion.' Now from these words, '*That ye may know that the Son of Man hath power on earth to forgive sins*,' it is apparent that the miracle of healing was designed to prove the truth of the claim which Jesus put forth when he said, 'Thy sins be forgiven thee.' We prefer here, however, for a reason which will be afterwards evident, to avail ourselves of the very clear and forcible explanation given by Archbishop Trench: 'They were murmuring, no doubt, within themselves, "These honours are easily snatched; any pretender may go about the world claiming this power, and saying to this man and that, *Thy sins be forgiven thee*, but where is the evidence that his word is allowed and ratified in heaven—that this which is spoken on earth is sealed in heaven? In the very nature of the power which this man asserts for himself he is secure from detection; for this releasing of a man from the condemnation of his sin is an act wrought in the inner spiritual world, attested by

no outer and visible sign; therefore it is easily claimed, since it cannot be disproved." And our Lord's answer, meeting this evil thought in their hearts, is in fact this: "You accuse me that I am claiming a safe power, since in the very nature of the benefit bestowed no sign follows—nothing to testify whether I have challenged it rightfully or not. I will therefore put myself now to a more decisive proof. I will speak a word. I will claim a power, which, if I claim falsely, I shall be convinced upon the instant to be an impostor and deceiver. I will say to this sick man, *Rise up and walk:* by the effects as they follow, or do not follow, you may judge whether I have a right to say to him, *Thy sins be forgiven thee.*" And again: "By doing that which is submitted to the eyes of men, I will attest my right and power to do that which in its very nature lies out of the region of proof."'[1] Here, then, the miracle is the attestation and confirmation by the supernatural which is seen, of the claim to a supernatural commission which is unseen.

But this is true, not of this one miracle alone;

[1] *Notes on the Miracles of our Lord.* Fifth Edition, pp. 205, 206.

for our Lord has used language which implies that his miracles *as a whole* were designed to have to his claims *as a whole* precisely the same relation which the healing of the paralytic here had to his claim of the right on earth to forgive sins. Let us look at the following passages: 'The works that I do in my Father's name bear witness of me.' 'If I do not the works of my Father, believe me not; but if I do, though you believe not me, believe the works, that ye may know and believe that the Father is in me and I in him.' 'If I had not done among them the works which none other man did, they had not had sin.' 'Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me? The words that I speak unto you, I speak not of myself; but the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works. Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father in me, or else believe me for the very works' sake.' Now, putting together all these words of the Lord Jesus, it is most evident that they imply the following things,—viz. that our Lord declared that his miracles were the Father's testimony to his claims; that, simply on the ground of the evidence which they gave,

men ought to hear and believe him; and that if, in the face of such evidence as they gave to him, men should reject him, they would be held guilty of aggravated and inexcusable sin.

The same deductions must be made from the words of the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews: 'How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him; *God also bearing them witness*, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to his own will?'[1] Most evidently, therefore, the New Testament view of the miracles is, that they are God's attestation and confirmation of the claims of those at whose word they were performed, and that thereby they also seal to us the truth of the doctrines which, in connection with them, were taught. The woman of Samaria rightly concluded that Jesus was a prophet, on the ground of the supernatural knowledge of her history which he manifested; and then she believed what he said to be the true word of a prophet, when,

[1] Heb. ii. 3, 4.

in answer to her reference to the Messiah, he declared, 'I that speak unto thee am he.' Reasoning from similar premises we come to a similar conclusion, and affirm that the miracles, when themselves proved to be genuine and real, do in their turn attest the claims put forth by Christ and his apostles, and so affix to all their statements the official and authoritative seal of God.

Against this reasoning, however, it has been by some contended, that so far from confirming the claims of those at whose word they were performed, and attesting the doctrines which they taught, the miracles must first be themselves tested by the doctrines, before they can hold any place as evidences for their divine authority. And it may be well to enter somewhat fully into the consideration of this subject, the rather that since the days of Coleridge, and very much owing to the influence exerted by him on modern theological inquiry, there has been a tendency among many to adopt opinions which, when fairly carried out, would, to our thinking, make the evidential value of miracles a vanishing quantity, and reduce it, in fact, to a nonentity.

Let us concede here that, in the age of the apologists, attention was too exclusively devoted by many to the department of external evidences, while that of the experimental was to a large extent neglected. Yet this affords no proper reason why, in a reaction from that which was undoubtedly one extreme, we should rush at once into the opposite. There are external evidences, and there are experimental evidences. Each species has its own province, and each is to be taken also in its own order. There is a divine adaptation in the doctrines of the gospel to the wants and condition of the human heart, and in seeking to establish the truth of Christianity, this must by no means be lost sight of; but neither, on the other hand, must we ourselves ignore, or suffer others to forget, the attestation of the claims of Jesus, which was given so gloriously by God in the miracles which he wrought. We do not put the miracles in the place of Christian experience; but neither must we allow Christian experience to push the miracles entirely into the shade. In the *line* of proof the miracles come first, introducing the messenger from heaven; then, on the ground

of that divine testimony which is borne to him, we believe his teaching; thereafter, his teaching being believed, there comes into force the argument from experience. Reverting again to the case of the woman of Samaria, it was the evidence given by her to the people of her city, regarding his miraculous knowledge of her history, that induced them to go to Jesus as the Messiah; but after they had gone, they came back saying, 'Now we believe, not because of thy saying' (or, no longer do we believe on thy mere word), 'for we have heard him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world,' —that is to say, they had now additional evidence besides that of the miracle to which she bore testimony, and from their own experience in their interview with him they were sure that he was Christ. But it must not be supposed that the miracle was of no value here, though they thus put their later experience above it; on the contrary, but for it, and the woman's testimony to it, they had never gone to see him. Now similarly with ourselves: if we have attained to the evidence of inward experience, we will unquestion-

ably, like these men of Sychar, declare that it is of far higher value than any which is merely external in its nature; but we are not at liberty to say that the miracles have done little or nothing to help us to such a condition. It is most unwise and pernicious to the interests of truth to set up one branch of evidence against another, as some writers have done; and if, in the remarks which follow, we shall be led to speak almost exclusively of the worth of miracles, and to take high ground in reference to that, let it not be supposed that, in order thereto, we are disposed to lower the platform on which the evidence of experience stands. On the contrary, we value the evidence from miracles mainly because it furnishes the gate through which we pass into the fortress of experience; and we seek to strengthen it on the same principle as, when a castle is beleaguered, the drawbridge is uplifted and the portcullis lowered, even although the garrison be confident that the innermost stronghold is impregnable.

By far the ablest exponent of the view which we are now to controvert is Archbishop Trench; and that we may not misrepresent his opinions,

we shall quote a few sentences from two of the preliminary dissertations prefixed to his valuable *Notes on the Miracles*. His words are these: 'A miracle does not prove the truth of a doctrine, or the divine mission of him that brings it to pass. That which alone it claims for him at the first is the right to be listened to; it puts him in the alternative of coming from heaven or from hell. The doctrine must first commend itself to the conscience as being good, and only then can the miracle seal it as divine. But the first appeal is from the doctrine to the moral nature of man.'[1] Again: 'It may be objected, if this be so, if there be this inward witness of the truth, what need then of the miracle? to what end does it serve when the truth has accredited itself already? It has indeed accredited itself as good, as from God in the sense that all which is good and true is from him, as whatever was precious in the teaching even of the heathen sage or poet was from him, but not yet as a new word directly from him, a new speaking on his part to man. The miracles are to be the credentials for the bearer of that

[1] *Notes on the Miracles*, as before, p. 24.

good word, signs that he has a special mission for the realization of the purpose of God in regard to humanity.'[1] Once more: 'Are, then, it may be asked, the miracles to occupy no place at all in the array of proofs for the certainty of the things which we have believed? On the contrary, a most important place. We should greatly miss them if they did not appear in sacred history, if we could not point to them there; for they belong to the very idea of a Redeemer, which would remain most incomplete without them. We could not ourselves, without having that idea infinitely weakened and impoverished, conceive of him as not doing such works; and those to whom we presented him as a Lord and Saviour might very well answer,—Strange that one should come to deliver men from the bondage of nature which was crushing them, and yet himself have been subject to its heaviest laws; himself wonderful, and yet his appearance accompanied by no analogous wonders in nature; claiming to be the life, and yet himself powerless in the encounter with death; however much he promised in word, never

[1] *Notes on the Miracles*, as before, p. 24.

realizing any part of his promise in deed; giving nothing in hand, no first-fruits of power, no pledges of great things to come. They would have a right to ask, Why did he give no signs that he came to connect the visible with the invisible world? Why did he do nothing to break the yoke of custom and experience, nothing to show men that the constitution which he pretended to reveal has a true foundation?'[1]

Along with these remarks there are others of great power and beauty, setting forth the value of the miracles as parabolic illustrations of the truth which Jesus taught, and the spiritual work which he came to perform; but regarding that aspect of the wondrous works of the Saviour, we are in perfect harmony with the Archbishop, believing that the character of the works and the circumstances in which they were wrought, throw a wondrous light upon the nature of the gospel, and the manner in which sinners become partakers of its salvation. We shall therefore confine our remarks to the extracts we have given. In them we find not a little of that luminous haze which

[1] *Notes on the Miracles*, as before, p. 93.

is so characteristic of the school of divines to which in this particular[1] he belongs; and it is sometimes difficult, for all so simple as the language looks, to seize the precise thought, if indeed there be precision in the thought, which he designs to express. Nevertheless we shall look somewhat minutely into his words, and endeavour to show their inconsistency, not only with the scriptural view which we have attempted to set forth, but also with his own explanation of the design of one of the miracles on which he has commented.

We may best expose the erroneous nature of his view in a series of observations.

First, it is utterly inconsistent with the clear meaning of the words of the Lord already quoted. Again and again the Saviour claimed to be received 'for the very works' sake;' and on one very solemn occasion he declared that the guilt of the Jews was greatly aggravated by the fact, that he had done such miracles in the

[1] We do not presume to place the name of the Archbishop in any one of the existing schools, as they are called, of the Church. He is more 'evangelical' than those usually called 'broad,' and yet more in sympathy with the 'broad' than are the evangelicals.

midst of them. Now, how could Jesus have spoken on this fashion, if his supernatural works claimed for him at first only the right to be listened to? He does not blame the Jews for not listening to him, neither does he find fault with them because, after hearing his words, they still refused to acknowledge his works as divine; but his charge is that they did not believe him, or receive him as the Messiah; and he declares that in rejecting him, they were guilty of aggravated sin, because the works which he did clearly proved him to be from the Father. Even when he was accused of casting out devils by Beelzebub the prince of devils; when, as Trench phrases it, he was 'put in the alternative of coming either from heaven or hell,'—he did *not* appeal to his doctrines to show that he was from heaven, as, on the Archbishop's showing, he might have been expected to do, but he referred simply to the nature of the miracle, and the absurdity involved in the idea of Satan casting out Satan. We do not dispute, indeed, that the truth has in it a self-evidencing power, and that sometimes our Lord gave prominence to that idea; but it is noteworthy, that

it is in the Gospel of John, who was, if we may so say, the evangelist who was most likely to dwell on that aspect of the matter, that we find these very strong appeals to the external miracles; and we cannot put any intelligible construction on these words of Jesus, if they do not mean that by the miracles God the Father attested his claims as the Messiah, and that, simply on the ground of that attestation, he had a right not only to be listened to, but to be believed and received as having come from God. Let the passage in the fourteenth chapter of John's Gospel be closely examined, and it will be seen that the language of our Lord implies, that if Philip could not receive so profound an utterance as that he was in the Father and the Father in him, on his simple word, there was enough in the works of a miraculous nature which he had seen Christ perform to warrant his faith, and that on that ground Jesus claimed his belief. As Alford has well put it in his note on the verse: 'The object seems to be to fix their attention on the *works* as a plain testimony, even to such as could not simply believe so deep a thing on his assertion, and one which should

become subjective in themselves hereafter, by virtue of their living union with him who is gone to the Father, and become the dispenser and channel of the Spirit;' or in simpler terms, on the plain ground of miracle he asks their acceptance of that which, now mysterious, was by and by to be to them matter of experience. But in all this, on Trench's principle, Jesus is laying a stress on the miracles which they are not able to bear, and weakening his cause by putting his claim to acceptance on purely objective grounds. Surely there must be something wrong with a theory which, in its sweeping results, would blame the Master for asking to be believed 'for the very works' sake.'

Secondly, This mode of viewing the miracles is inconsistent with the Archbishop's own explanation of the evidential value of the healing of the paralytic, in the passage which we have already quoted.[1] Let the reader go back and re-peruse the very clear and admirable expansion of the Saviour's reply to the unspoken murmur of the Scribes, 'Why doth this man thus speak blasphemies? who can forgive sins but God only?' and

[1] See before, pp. 165, 166.

then let him consider whether that account of this individual case can be rendered consistent with the canons which he has laid down regarding miracles in general. Was this act of healing only designed to claim for Jesus 'a right to be listened to'? did it simply place him 'in the alternative of coming from heaven or hell'? Nay, for the Archbishop himself has declared that our Lord, in performing it, did in effect say, 'By doing that which is submitted to the eye of men, *I will attest my right and power to do that which in its very nature lies out of the region of proof.*' Here, then, is one case where a miracle did prove, on our author's own showing, the truth of a doctrine and the divine mission of him who brought it to pass. But if in one instance the principle of Trench is falsified, can it be received at all; especially when, as we have shown, we have our Lord speaking of his miracles as a whole in language which plainly indicates, that they stood in relation to his claims and doctrines as a whole, precisely as this miracle of healing did in relation to his assumption of power on earth to forgive sin?

Once more, was the first appeal in this case

from the doctrine to the moral nature in man? Nay, for the eloquent commentator has affirmed that the thing which the miracle was produced to attest, was one 'which in its very nature lay out of the region of proof,' and of which the objectors could not have any positive assurance otherwise than by miracle.

Again, had the doctrine here to commend itself as good, before the miracle could seal it as divine? So far from this, if in this instance the goodness of a doctrine were to be admitted as an infallible test of a miracle, then the Scribes would have been justified in rejecting both the miracle and the Lord. Undoubtedly they were right in their belief that only God could forgive sin; that was a good doctrine; and yet, as we see, if they had been bound only to test the miracle by that, they would have been blameless in rejecting it. But here perhaps Trench would try to save himself by saying, that the miracle in this case proclaims it to be a *new word directly* from God, that Jesus, as the Son of Man, had power on earth to forgive sin. Unfortunately, however, on his own showing, it cannot be authenticated as a new word by the miracle,

until it has first been received as a true word by the conscience. Now on the very surface of the narrative it appears that the work was done, not after the doctrine was received as good and true, but for the purpose of convincing all present of its truth; since, before he spoke to the sick man, he said he did it 'that they might know that the Son of Man hath power on earth to forgive sin.' Here, therefore, most unquestionably, the first appeal was not to the moral nature, but to the miracle, the supernatural work being done to prove the truth of the doctrine, and confirm the claims of the Messiah; and as we have already seen that what was true of this particular case is true also of all the miracles, it must follow that the opinion which we are controverting is untenable.

Finally here, this opinion is inconsistent with itself, in giving a changing value to the miracle, according to the time at which it is considered. At first it is only a call to attention; then, when the doctrine is approved by the conscience, the miracle becomes a divine attestation of the doctrine as a new word from God. Now this is most

shifting ground, and betrays a disposition to put a different value on the same thing at different times. What a miracle is, we maintain, it is always. It stands on its own foundation, and is to be judged by its own standard; and if received as a divine work, its testimony is distinct, determinate, and constant—not one thing now, and another again. If it do not at first attest the doctrine as from God, it cannot afterwards; if it confirm the divinity of the doctrine at all, it must do so from the first and always. Such a method of dealing with it as the Archbishop has adopted, must end in making it prove nothing. 'If,' as Dr Wardlaw[1] says admirably here, 'so far as the miracle is concerned, the message which it accompanies may be from hell as well as from heaven; from the devil as well as from God; from the kingdom of lies no less than from the kingdom of truth; if the miracle implies no more than a right to be listened to, having nothing in it at all evidential of the source from which the message comes, it is not easy to see how it can *become* evidential of this, *after* that source has been ascertained, from the nature of the

[1] Wardlaw *On Miracles*, pp. 215, 216.

message itself. If it is not proof *at first* of the message being from God, it cannot be proof afterwards. It may, if you will, be regarded as attesting its being "a new word," but not as attesting a new word *from him*, or a new speaking *on his part* to man. *That* is determined by the character of the message itself, as attested by man's conscience or moral nature. The miracle attests nothing. It may be a diabolical sign just as really and as much as a divine one. It is *solely* the nature of the doctrine that certifies its origin, not the miracle *at all*. The theory, as it appears to me, divests miracles of their evidential value entirely.' This difficulty seems to have been felt by Trench himself, for once and again he asks, 'Are the miracles to occupy no place in the array of proofs?' and then having given them, in one sentence only, a subjective value as belonging to the very idea of a Redeemer, which would remain incomplete without them, he oscillates back, as we think, to the old view, admitting that, if there were no miracles, men would be justified in saying of Jesus, 'Why did he give no signs that he came to connect the visible with the invisible world?

Strange that one should come, himself wonderful, and yet his appearance accompanied by no analogous wonders in nature!' But what is this if it be not a craving for some external attestation or sign of the wonderful mission? What is this but asking some evidence by means of the supernatural that is seen, of the supernatural that is unseen, and lies out of the region of proof? The more we ponder over these somewhat mysterious sentences, the more are we disposed to ask, Can it be that the miracles were things with such an intangible value that we cannot shape it into distinctness? or that works to which our Lord so clearly appealed in proof of his mission, should thus, like a dissolving view, pass while we look at them from one thing into another, and finally fade away into nonentity? It were a poor exchange for the definiteness of the old scriptural teaching on this point, to accept the vagueness of that which has here been substituted.

Thirdly, This opinion is unsatisfactory, inasmuch as the appeal which it makes to the moral nature of man, by the issue of which the miracle is to be tested, must ever be a most uncertain, and there-

fore a very useless criterion. We have here, indeed, the very foundation principle of rationalism, which, fairly carried out, would lead to the rejection by each man of the miracles and doctrines which his moral nature did not acknowledge. We of course admit, and that too most cheerfully, that the truth of God does commend itself to every man's conscience in the sight of God; but that is a very different thing from making the conscience, depraved as it is, the standard by which all that claims to be truth is to be tried. Why, let us ask, is an external revelation needed by man at all, if it be not to give him a standard which shall have the virtue of certainty, and so deliver him from the discordant utterances of his own and his fellows' intuitions? But precisely as there was need for an external revelation to be a standard of truth, so there was a necessity that that revelation should itself, in some external way, convince us of its genuineness; and this is done by miracles. As a very able and acute writer on this subject has said: 'They are the criterion by which a real is distinguished from a pretended revelation—the mark by which we know that God has spoken, and

discriminate his word from the word of man. An external, objective, palpable test is the only one which can meet the exigencies of the case. If men are thrown upon their intuitions, impulses, and emotions, their pretended revelations will be as numerous and as discordant as the dialects of Babel. Each man will have his doctrine and his psalm. The necessity of such a test has been universally acknowledged. The Catholic feels it, and appeals to a visible, infallible society, which is to judge between the genuine and spurious; the Protestant feels it, and appeals to his Bible; the Bible bows to the same necessity, and appeals to miracles. These, it triumphantly exclaims, distinguish my doctrines from those of every other book, and seal them with the impress of God. A religion of authority is the only bulwark against fanaticism on the one hand, and a dead naturalism on the other.'[1]

Fourthly, This view of Trench's is based on what seems to us the erroneous opinion, that true

[1] *British and Foreign Evangelical Review* for January 1858, pp. 88, 89. The whole article from which this quotation is made deserves the study of every one who would arrive at a sound conclusion on the subject which we are here discussing.

miracles may be performed in attestation of falsehood. Immediately preceding the extracts which we have given we find this statement: 'This fact, however, that the kingdom of lies has its wonders no less than the kingdom of truth, would be alone sufficient to convince us, that miracles cannot be appealed to absolutely and simply in proof of the doctrine which the worker of them proclaims; and God's word expressly declares the same (Deut. xiii. 5).'[1] But a little before,[2] he had said that the works of antichrist and his organs are not 'miracles, in the very highest sense of the word; they only in part partake of the essential elements of the miracle.' Now if this be so, surely the conclusion to be drawn from the fact, if it be a fact, that the kingdom of lies has its wonders as well as the kingdom of truth, ought to be, not that a miracle purely and simply cannot prove a doctrine, but that only miracles in the very highest sense of the term (as all through we have been using it), and possessing all the essential elements of the miracle, do absolutely and simply prove a doctrine. The amount of the argument

[1] *Notes on the Miracles*, as above, pp. 23, 24. [2] *Ibid.* p. 23.

here, therefore, is simply to put us on our guard, to warn us against being imposed upon by miracles which are not so in the very highest sense of the term, and to bid us, before implicitly receiving the doctrine on the faith of the miracle, be sure that it be a miracle that will warrant us to do so. The Archbishop here, therefore, touches the criterion of miracles, and not at all the evidential value of those, which on right grounds are received as works of God. We gladly here avail ourselves of the words of the able author already quoted:[1] 'The true doctrine being, that as the miracle proves by an evidence inherent in itself, no miracles should be admitted as the credentials of a messenger or doctrine, but those which carry their authority upon their face. Doubtful miracles are in the same category with doubtful arguments; and if a religion relies upon this class alone to substantiate its claims, it relies upon a broken reed. There are some things which we pronounce intuitively to be the sole prerogative of God. Others may be doubtful, but these are as clear as light. This is the class of miracles on

[1] *British and Foreign Evangelical Review*, as before, pp. 85, 86.

which a religion must rely.' Thus far, therefore, granting the Archbishop's premises, we admit that the conclusion from them will carry us; but we demur entirely to the sweeping inference, that no miracle can be simply and absolutely appealed to in proof of a doctrine.

Let us look, however, at his premises themselves. Is it the case that miracles, in any proper sense of the word, have been wrought by evil spirits, or by the organs of antichrist, in support of error? In answer to this question it might perhaps be enough to say with Mansell,[1] 'It remains yet to be shown, that in all human experience any instance can be produced of a real miracle wrought by evil spirits for the purposes of deception;' but to content ourselves with this would perhaps leave room for the assertion, that we shrink from an investigation of the passages of Scripture which are generally supposed to bear upon this point. The most important of these are the chapters in the beginning of Exodus, relative to the works of the Egyptian magicians, and the verses in Deuteronomy re-

[1] *Aids to Faith*, p. 33.

ferred to by Trench in the extract already quoted. Let us examine them both.

First, as to the wonders wrought by the magicians. From a careful study of the chapters in the sacred narrative which record the doings of Jannes, Jambres, and their coadjutors, the following things may be gathered,—namely, that they could only go a certain length in their reproduction (allowing for the moment that they were reproductions) of the work of Moses; that on all the occasions on which their feats were successful, intimation was given by Moses of what he was about to do, in time to allow opportunity on their part for preparation; that in the case in which they failed this intimation was not given, and so they were taken unawares, having had no information furnished them, and no preparation made. Now, does not all this look as if they had in the successful instances prepared themselves by some natural means to produce something like what Moses was to do; but that on this new occasion, being taken by surprise, they only made a feint of attempting to counterfeit it, and immediately covered their retreat by saying, 'This is the finger

of God'? Indeed, if this explanation be not accepted, it will be hard to see what there was more difficult in the bringing of the lice than in the production of the frogs; nay, if it be allowed that they really and truly changed a rod into a serpent, which was a virtual act of creation, it will be impossible to tell why those who could do that divine work could not perform this other. Hence, putting all these things together, we are compelled to conclude that the wonders done by the magicians were not miracles at all, but mere feats of legerdemain, similar to those which are common to this day among the jugglers of the East.

But some will say, Is it not affirmed that the magicians did *so*, and does not this imply that they did the same things as Moses? No, we reply; for in the instance in which they failed the same words are employed, 'The magicians did *so*, and they could not.'

What is conclusive on the point, however, is the fact already adverted to, that the things done at the word of Moses were virtual creations. Now, if there be one power which may be regarded as more peculiarly and incommunicably divine than

another, it is that of creation; yet here, if these magicians did real miracles, we are required to believe that created spirits, it makes no matter whether human or demoniacal, working in antagonism to God, did exercise this divine omnipotence. The thing is preposterous. Even if we were to admit, what indeed we are not concerned to deny, that evil spirits can produce physical effects just as the will of man can, yet it is inconceivable either that they should have a power that is distinctively divine, or that God should delegate that power to them for the mere purpose of contending with it, as if one in a game of chess should match his right hand against his left. Clearly, therefore, whatever those works of the magicians were, they were not miracles in the only sense in which we can employ that term.

But neither is there any foundation for the view of Trench in the passage in Deuteronomy to which he has referred. The words are these (chap. xiii. 1–5): 'If there arise among you a prophet, or a dreamer of dreams, and giveth thee a sign or a wonder, and the sign or the wonder come to pass, whereof he spake unto thee, saying, Let us go after

other gods, which thou hast not known, and let us serve them; thou shalt not hearken unto the words of that prophet, or that dreamer of dreams: for the Lord your God proveth you, to know whether ye love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul. Ye shall walk after the Lord your God, and fear him, and keep his commandments, and obey his voice, and ye shall serve him, and cleave unto him. And that prophet, or that dreamer of dreams, shall be put to death; because he hath spoken to turn you away from the Lord your God, which brought you out of the land of Egypt, and redeemed you out of the house of bondage, to thrust thee out of the way which the Lord thy God commanded thee to walk in: so shalt thou put the evil away from the midst of thee.' Now let us remember that this passage is adduced to prove that the first appeal is from the doctrine to the moral nature of man, because the kingdom of lies has its wonders as well as the kingdom of truth. But a little investigation will convince any one that the appeal here is not to the conscience at all, but to a previous external revelation from

God miraculously attested; and the argument is, that as God cannot deny or contradict himself, when signs or wonders are wrought in opposition to the doctrine of that revelation, these wonders are to be held as impostures, and the doer of them is to be put to death. The case is not that of a people to whom miracles are presented for the first time, but rather that of those who had themselves seen such sublime works wrought by God, as the dividing of the sea, the giving of the manna, the bringing of water out of the rock, and the leading of the tribes by the pillar and the cloud. Now as their law had been thus unequivocally established by God, they were not to allow themselves to be moved from it by anything else, however much it might resemble miracle; even although the wonder should seem to come to pass, they were to account it false and not from God, inasmuch as he could not deny himself. Hence this passage makes its appeal not to the moral nature of man, but to the consistency of God; and it makes the doctrines only a test of miracle, *after they have themselves been received as miraculously attested as divine.* The verses pre-

suppose that God has already spoken, and that his words have been confirmed by miracle, and have as such been received; thereafter, but not till then, the doctrines become a test by which to try all other claimants to the supernatural, and no one is to be received who proclaims another Lord, and seeks to withdraw us from him whose revelation we have already in our hands. Thus interpreted, the words in Deuteronomy are for the law, what Paul's are for the gospel: 'Though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you, than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed.'

It may be said, however, that if a previous external revelation, miraculously attested, ought to be thus employed to try the miracles of those who might arise and pretend to work them, then, by parity of reasoning, the prior revelation which God has made of himself in the heart of man should be employed to test the doctrines of the divine messenger, and through them the miracles which he professes to perform; so that thus we are brought back to the old appeal to the moral nature of man. But we must distinguish between things

that differ. In the case supposed by Moses, the pretender to miraculous power seeks to oppose and draw men away from truth which they have already received on good evidence as divine; whereas, in the other case, he is adducing his supernatural works as witnesses of the divinity of some new truth, not contradicting that which they have already received, but so far transcending it as to be above the reach of their discovery. In this last instance, the miracle-worker takes his stand upon admitted and accepted truth, and seeks to lead men up to some new and higher principles, the miracle being not a witness of the old which they have already received, but of the new which he desires them to accept. If he controverted the old, then the law laid down by Moses might come into operation; but if he simply builds upon it, and seeks only to rise above it, then most evidently the old received doctrine cannot be made a test of any kind wherewith to try the miracle by which he confirms the new. The miracles are not wrought by him in support of natural religion, or those truths which may be eliminated from the moral nature of man, but in confirmation of the

new truths which he is bringing to light: hence it must be evident at a glance, that in a case like this, the old truths of natural religion, admitted and acted upon as they are by both parties, are comparatively worthless as tests either of the miracles or of the new truths revealed in connection with them. In the case of the Scriptures, indeed, the harmony of their doctrines with the moral nature of man is one of the proofs of their truth, but it is not on this that the value of the evidence of miracles depends. They have their own distinct and independent place. They stand upon a footing of their own; and if the works be received as divine, then, since they proceed on the admission of the truths of natural theology, the natural theologian has nothing further to do than to listen and believe the revelation which they introduce.

But we need not linger longer here, since the thoughtful reader must be already convinced of the unsatisfactory and untenable character of the views maintained by the eminent writer to whom we have referred; nor would we have dwelt so long upon his argument, if it had not been that the weight of his great ability, and

deservedly high position, is apt to influence many who will not take the trouble to look thoroughly into his reasoning. His error seems to us to be, that he has given forth his Christian view of miracles, as if it were that of an inquirer coming toward Christianity, but not yet a believer in its truth. There is a sense in which it is correct to say, that 'the true relation is one of mutual interdependence, the miracles proving the doctrines, and the doctrines approving the miracles, and both held together for us in blessed unity in the person of him who spake the words and did the works;' but this is *after* the divinity of the miracles and the truth of the doctrines have been both believed. It may be true also, that in looking on the doctrines as throwing back light on the miracles, we are receiving 'the sum total of the impression which this divine revelation is intended to make on us, instead of taking an impression only partial and one-sided;' but it is equally true, that this sum total comes to us in two different instalments.[1]

[1] Similarly Isaac Taylor, in his thoughtful book, entitled *The Restoration of Belief*, p. 103, has said: You have to do with one who

Our readers must not imagine that, in placing the miracles on this ground, we are contending for what is of comparatively minor importance. The rationalism of Germany was preceded by that mystic Pietism, which, in its overvaluing of experience, gave no heed to miracles and the other departments of external evidence, and so prepared the way for the dreary naturalism which followed; and in our own day the Intuitionalism which Coleridge did so much to introduce, and

offers to your eye his credentials, his diploma, duly signed and sealed, and which declare him to be a personage of the highest rank. All seems genuine in these evidences. At the same time the style and tone, the air and behaviour of this personage, and all that he says and what he informs you of, and the instructions he gives you, are in every respect consistent with his pretensions, as set forth in the instrument he brings with him. It is not, then, that you alternately believe his credentials to be genuine, *because* his deportment and his language are becoming to his alleged rank; and then that you yield to the impression which has been made upon your feelings by his deportment, because you have admitted the credentials to be true. Your belief is the product of a simultaneous accordance of the two species of proof; it is a combined force that carries conviction, not a succession of proofs in line.' Hardly so, for the credentials are presented before the instructions of the person are heard or his deportment observed. So acute a thinker must have seen that there *is* succession here, and that the accordance of two species of proof of this sort cannot be simultaneous. The credentials have their own tests, and the instructions and deportment have theirs. They are both distinct, and must be separately examined; so that the impression derived from both cannot be called a simultaneous accordance of the two.

which, as taught by him, laughed all evidences to scorn, and treated Paley with contempt, has been the precursor of such books as *Essays and Reviews* and the volumes of Colenso. Hence, judging the present in the light of the past, it is of the greatest moment that, while we carefully maintain the testimony of experience, we allow the miracles also to speak for themselves and to give, as they were designed to give, a clear, certain, and independent confirmation of the claims of the divine messenger, and the truth of the divine message.

CONCLUSION.

We have now reached the close of the argument which in these pages we have attempted to prosecute; and if we have succeeded in establishing the various points to which we have directed the attention of our readers, we stand on a foundation of rock, while with Nicodemus we say to Jesus, 'We know that thou art a teacher come from God, for no man can do these miracles which thou dost except God be with him.' But if this be so, what then? Can we consistently stop short with this assertion, and not go on to receive the truth which he has come to communicate, and accept the salvation which he has so completely wrought out and so freely proffered? If the line of proof which we have adopted be conclusive, it must follow not only that Jesus is *a* Saviour, but that there is no other Saviour than he; and so a keen

edge is given to the question of the apostle, 'How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?'

Will my readers forgive me, if in this closing paragraph I quit the calm argumentative style to which throughout I have studiously confined myself, and make a personal appeal, beseeching them to consider the choice which is thus presented to them—salvation through the reception of the crucified but divinely attested Christ; or, as the punishment of rejecting him, everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his power. Take heed how you decide between these alternatives, for it is ETERNITY that trembles in the balance. Beware, I beseech you, of the sin and doom of those of whom the Lord himself thus spoke: 'If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin; but now they have no cloak for their sin. He that hateth me, hateth my Father also. If I had not done among them the works that none other man did, they had not had sin; but now they have both seen and hated both me and my Father.'

APPENDIX.

NOTE A.—SEE PAGE ~~12~~ 29

THE DARWINIAN THEORY.

'IT does not require an intimate acquaintance with science to enable one to estimate the logical worth of the arguments by which scientific men arrive at conclusions on the questions considered in this lecture. If it did, I should hesitate about offering any strictures upon their reasonings. But logic is the same for science as for other departments of inquiry; and a fallacy may be detected in the form of scientific reasoning by one who is obliged to take the materials of reasoning on trust from the party who reasons. This consideration has been present with me in writing this lecture, and I would now take courage from it to offer a remark on the development theory, as it has been called. At the basis of this theory lies a fallacy which necessarily vitiates and nullifies the entire conclusion. Its exponents have confounded progress in series with growth from a germ, two things as distinct in themselves as number and

magnitude. It may seem incredible that men of ability should fall into a paralogism like this; but that they have done so, the following extracts from one of the ablest of the advocates of the development theory will clearly show. "To suppose," says Mr Darwin, "that the eye, with all its inimitable contrivances for adjusting the focus to different distances, for admitting different amounts of light, and for the correction of spherical and chromatic aberration, could have been formed by natural selection, seems, I freely confess, absurd in the highest degree. Yet reason tells us that, of numerous gradations from a perfect and complex eye, to one very imperfect and simple, each grade, being useful to its possessor, can be shown to exist." Now the argument here is, that though a perfect eye seems to indicate indubitably that it is the product of a designing mind, this conclusion is invalidated by the fact, that a *gradation* of eyes, from the perfect to the imperfect, is discoverable. A gradation in what? we ask: a gradation in the eyes of animals of the same species, or in the eyes of animals of different species? a gradation from a perfect human eye to an imperfect one, or from the perfect human eye to the imperfect eye of the lowest of the brute tribes? The latter is obviously that which Mr Darwin has in view, as the former does not exist. But what has this to do with development or natural selection?

Could it be shown that in the human race there is a gradation from a perfect eye to an imperfect, and that races, as they advance in culture, develop gradually the organ more and more perfectly; or could it be sworn that a change of this sort has ever happened to the human race, a case of development would then be worth looking at. But to argue that the human eye has been gradually developed from that of the fish, because a gradation may be traced through different kinds of animals from the one to the other, is not less absurd than it would be, where a regular gradation in size may be traced from the eldest children in a family to the youngest, to maintain that therefore the former had been developed out of the latter. Absurd, also, is this talk about perfect eyes and imperfect. The eyes of one animal are as perfect as those of another, *i.e.* equally fitted for the purposes for which they are designed, and for the place the animal was to occupy. We need not go to the human eye for evidences of design; the eye of an insect, a bird, or a fish will serve as well. Each is, as an organ, perfect in relation to that for which it exists, and we never find it passing by a series of changes into something more perfect.

'Mr Darwin goes on to say, "If further, the eye does vary ever so slightly, and the variations be inherited, which is certainly the case, and if any variation or modification of the organ be ever

useful to an animal under changing conditions of life, then the difficulty of believing that a perfect or complex eye could be formed by natural selection, though inseparable to an imagination, can hardly be considered real." To this I cannot reply, as I do not understand it. It may be at once conceded that the eyes of different men vary, and that these varieties may be inherited; that a man with black eyes, or prominent eyes, or whose sight is short, may propagate these peculiarities to his children. This, however, cannot be what Mr Darwin refers to, for this has nothing to do with his subject. To what variations, then, does he refer? To variations which may occur in the eyes of the same animal in the course of life? But what are they? A man's eyes change, no doubt, as he grows older; the orb becomes less convex, the glance less piercing, the movement less quick; but are such changes propagated to his children, should he beget any, in his old age? or in what possible sense can such changes be regarded as ministering to the uses of the man under changing circumstances? I feel myself quite thrown out here. That the author had a meaning which he sought to express by the words I have quoted, I am bound to believe; but what he meant by them I confess myself utterly unable to make out.'[1]

[1] Note to Lecture v. in *St Paul at Athens*, by Dr W. L. Alexander, pp. 140–143.

The latest view of Hugh Miller on this matter may prove interesting to the reader. We extract the following from *The Testimony of the Rocks*: 'When the Lamarckian affirms that all our recent species of plants and animals were developed out of previously existing plants and animals of species entirely different, he affirms what, if true, *would* be capable of proof; and so, if it cannot be proven, it is only because it is not true. The trilobites have been extinct ever since the times of the mountain limestone; and yet, by a series of specimens, the individual development of certain species of this family, almost from the extrusion of the animal from the egg until the attainment of its full size, has been satisfactorily shown. By specimen after specimen has every stage of growth and every degree of development been exemplified, and the palæontologist has come as thoroughly to know the creatures in consequence, under their various changes from youth to age, as if they had been his contemporaries, and had grown up under his eye. An had and existing species, vegetable and animal, been derived from other species of the earlier periods, it would have been equally possible to demonstrate by a series of specimens their relationship. Let us again instance the British shells. Losing certain species in each of the older and yet older deposits at which we successively arrive, we at length reach the red and coralline crags,

where we find mingled with the familiar forms a large percentage of forms now extinct; then going on to the shells of the lower miocene, more than six hundred species appear, almost all of which are strange to us; and then passing to the eocene shells of the *calcaire gronier*, we find ourselves among well-nigh as large a group of yet other and older strangers, not one of which we are able to identify with any shell now living in the British area. There could thus be no lack of materials for forming such a genealogy of the British shells had they been gradually developed out of the extinct species, as that which M. Barrandee has formed of the trilobites. But no such genealogy can be formed. We cannot link on a single recent shell to a single extinct one. *Up* to a certain point we find the recent shells exhibiting all their present specific peculiarities, and beyond that point they cease to appear. *Down* to a certain point the extinct shells also exhibit all *their* specific peculiarities, and then they disappear for ever. There are no intermediate species—no connecting links—no such connected series of specimens to be found, as enables us to trace a trilobite through all its metamorphoses from youth to age. All geologic history is full of the beginning and ending of species—of their first and their last days; but it exhibits no genealogies of development. The Lamarckian sets himself to grapple

in his dream with the history of all creation. We awaken him, and ask him to grapple instead with the history of but a few individual species; with that of the mussel or the whelk, the clam or the oyster; and we find, from his helpless ignorance and incapacity, what a mere pretender he is.'[1]

We gladly also refer the reader to the excellent prefatory remarks of Mrs Miller in the last edition of the *Footprints of the Creator*, where he will find an excellent summary of the fatal objections to Mr Darwin's views, warranting the conclusion: 'There is surely something egregiously false in a theory which has both to supplant real by suppositious facts, and to come into collision with that attribute of law, without which man's reason would be useless, and his researches vain.'[2]

Note B.

In his Inaugural Address as Chancellor of the University of Edinburgh, Lord Brougham expressed himself regarding David Hume as follows: 'The sound doctrines on all subjects of moral, political, and theological science, at all times taught within these walls, have established the character of the University upon a solid foundation. But it is not to be forgotten that injury to the cause of truth has been done by a

[1] Pp. 200, 201. [2] P. 58.

very eminent person, in whose great capacity and celebrity this city takes a just pride, how much soever his talents may have been misapplied; and it well becomes the instructors of youth strenuously to counteract the influence of David Hume, both on account of the incalculable importance of the subjects on which he was misled, and also in respect of a far less material circumstance, the disposition of ignorant persons in other countries to represent him as having promoted an infidel school or sect in Scotland. It is fit on this point that the truth should be plainly spoken. Mr Hume was not a sceptic either in his political or his religious errors. His opinions were perfectly decided when they could be held upon positive or affirmative positions; and as decided as any that could be held upon mere negations. He was the adversary of popular rights, and the ally of the English High Church party against these rights, widely as he differed from all churches upon the grounds of their belief and the foundations of their power. He was upon all religion, both natural and revealed, a disbeliever rather than an unbeliever; rejecting the evidence of the former, and declaring it to be wholly insufficient to prove the existence of a Deity or the immortality of the soul; and holding the statements upon which the latter rests to be not only false but impossible. This is not scepticism, but dogmatism.

It is the assertion, that of a miracle there *can* be no proof; that of a God and future state there *is* no proof, no reason whatever for believing it. This, then, is atheism, as much as any person of sound mind can hold the opinion; and this ought constantly to be exposed as such and refuted. Fortunately there are the means of triumphant refutation; for the whole argument of Mr Hume rests upon an entire misconception of the nature of inductive reasoning; and it is not too much to affirm that, if he had ever attended to any branch of natural philosophy, he could not have fallen into so manifest an error. *There is no one part of the argument which would not destroy all inductive science.* All generalization would be put an end to; experimental inquiries must stand still; no step could be made, no conclusion drawn, beyond the mere facts observed; and the science must be turned from the process of general reasoning upon particular facts into the bare records of those particular facts, themselves. The late discoveries in fossil osteology afford additional proof of Mr Hume's hasty assumption both on the question of a providence and on that of miracles. It is now proved by evidence, which he must have admitted to be sufficient, that at one remote period in the history of our globe there was an exertion of creative power to form the human and certain other races not before existing; so that he must

have believed in the miracle of creation; that is, the interposition of a Being powerful enough to suspend the established order of things and make a new one. The argument rests on the same grounds as to a future state, in so far as he denies the proof of a power to continue the soul apart from the body. But there is this material difference in the evidence, that our induction is conclusive as to the existence of the Deity, and the independent and separate nature of the soul but only proves the probability of its continued existence. Its entirely different nature from matter, as shown in the quickness of its operations; its independence of the body, proved by the faculties sometimes becoming stronger as the body decays; above all, its surviving the complete change of the body, so that hardly a particle of the corporeal frame remains, while the mind continues unchanged, unless perhaps by gaining strength,—all demonstrate its different constitution and its independent existence; and, as there is no one example of annihilation in the universe, and what is termed destruction being only dissolution and new combination, and the soul, from the singleness of its nature, without parts, being incapable of such destruction, we are left to infer, from the prevalence of benevolent design in all the Creator's works, that he will continue what he has formed, and so largely endowed, and so bountifully cherished.

'It is not perhaps just to consider Mr Hume's unfortunate views as adopted from the desire to take a line different from the commonly received opinions, though the force of this temptation to a young author may be naturally enough suspected. . . . Of carelessness in some instances, and prejudice in others, his writings on religious subjects give constant proofs. The entire misapplication of Archbishop Tillotson's argument on the real presence is one instance, and the perversion or ignorance of inductive science is another; to which it may be added his failing to observe that the argument against miracles would apply to cases of testimony which may be put as quite decisive, and which he himself must admit.'

We take the following from *Caxtoniana, a Series of Essays on Life, Literature, and Manners*, by Sir E. Bulwer Lytton, Bart. The extract is from the thirteenth Essay of the first volume, 'On the Spirit in which new Theories should be received,' pp. 222–226.

'Suppose that a philosopher is in doubt as to the length of a telescope in a friend's possession, and that ten persons, of whose general veracity there is no question, tell him that they have measured the telescope, and it is twenty feet long, he will accept their evidence, and cease to entertain a doubt as to the length of the telescope. But suppose this same philosopher had arrived at

the conclusion that the moon is incapable of harbouring any form of organic life, and the same ten persons, whose evidence he has just accepted in a matter on which no pride of science is involved, tell him that they have been looking through a telescope at the moon, and that they all, one after the other, have seen an enormous creature endowed with organic life; they entreat the philosopher to come and see this phenomenon himself; would the philosopher be justified in saying, "I shall not deign to take any such idle trouble. I have satisfied myself that no such creature can possibly exist in the moon; your declaration is against the laws of nature; excuse me if, against the laws of nature, I can accept no evidence, however respectable. It is within the laws of nature that you ten gentlemen should tell a falsehood, or be deceived by an optical illusion. I accept either of these hypotheses as possible, and I will not debase the dignity of science by examining into that which I know to be impossible." Would the philosopher be justified in saying this? Certainly he would not be justified by any affection for truth. He would be a bigot from the motive most common to bigots, viz. inordinate self-esteem. But perhaps it may be said that no genuine philosopher would have so replied. Pardon me, that answer would be a warrantable deduction from the philosophy of Hume. When

Hume speaks of the wonders, or as he calls them miracles, wrought at the tomb of Abbé Paris, the famous Jansenist, he says, "Where shall we find such a number of circumstances agreeing to the corroboration of one fact? And what have we to oppose to such a cloud of witnesses, but the absolute impossibility or miraculous nature of the events which they relate? And this surely, in the eyes of all reasonable people, will alone be regarded as a sufficient refutation." Scarcely so; for what we call impossible in matters of fact deponed by numerous witnesses not interested in the fabrication of a lie, is merely a something opposed to our own experience. *And if a philosopher is to pronounce for himself what is impossible and what is not, there would soon be no philosophy at all.* When the Indian prince asserted it to be impossible that water could become solid, it was because that assertion was opposed to his experience. But in spite of his experience, it was not only possible, it was a positive fact; and I cannot agree with Hume, that the king of Siam's incredulity was "reasonable." Modern physiology has given sure solution of those "miracles" at the Jansenist's tomb, which Hume at once declared needed no other refutation than that of their own miraculous nature. Cures that baffle science are effected by imagination. Allow for the inevitable additions

which all stories receive as they pass from lip to lip, and not the least the stories of unusual occurrences, and the cures wrought at the Jansenist's tomb are facts; marvels if you please, yet not miracles. Certainly Newton would not have so answered, for he never refused to examine. He "was prepared at any moment to abandon his theory." "When Bradley and others had observed a certain rotation of the earth which they could not account for, and were thinking it was destroying entirely the Newtonian system, they were under the greatest difficulty how to break it to Sir Isaac, and proceeded to do so by degrees and in the softest manner." What was his only answer? "It may be so; there is no arguing against facts and experiments." He did not reply that Bradley's discovery was impossible, because it was against the laws of nature, as these laws were interpreted by the Newtonian system. But it is more convenient to philosophers to deny the evidence of facts and experiments which expose their system, than it is on the strength of evidence to examine the facts, and test the experiments; more consonant to "the dignity of science," to say, "impossible" with Hume, than "it may be so" with Newton.

'Now had my philosopher, who had decided on the laws of nature as affecting the products of the moon, replied to the ten witnesses of the alleged

creature in that orb, "It may be so; at the same time my persuasions to the contrary are so strong that I must judge for myself," and then looked through the telescope with inquisitive anxious eyes, perhaps he might have found the wonder explicable and his system unharmed. He might, indeed, have beheld the monster, whose existence seemed to destroy his theory; but discovered on careful scrutiny that it was no inhabitant of the moon, but a blue-bottle fly that had got on the glass, and viewed through the magnifier seemed bigger than a dragon.

'Possibly if a philosopher who possessed in an equal degree the virtue of candour and the acuteness of science, would condescend to examine, as Bacon and Newton would unquestionably have examined, some of the modern thaumaturgia recorded by witnesses whose evidence would decide any matter of fact in any court of law,—possibly he might either make an immense progress in our knowledge of the law of nature, or prevent incalculable mischief in the spread of a new superstition. If he say, "What you tell me is impossible; I will not stoop to examine," he abandons the field to those who examine, deprived of the guide which his science would be to them; if he come to examine with old-fashioned notions drawn from the last century's stupid materialism, which any youth of our time, fit to mature into physio-

logist or metaphysician, knows to be obsolete rubbish, he may call himself a philosopher; posterity will call him some hard name or another—certainly not philosopher. But if he say quietly with Newton, "It may be so; there is no arguing against facts and experiments. I dare not say that when you all, being respectable intelligent men, agree that you see a monster in the moon, you are liars or idiots; but before I believe in the monster, you must permit me to examine the telescope,"—then the philosopher is indeed a philosopher; and then he may find, and then he may prove, to the satisfaction of all whom the portent appalled, that the monster in the moon is a bluebottle fly on the lens.'

Note C.

INCONSISTENCIES WHICH RENAN'S VIEW OF THE MIRACLES INVOLVES IN THE CHARACTER OF JESUS.

'It is the judgment of the orthodox that the Gospels have solved the amazing problem of giving moral unity, not only to the elements of a perfect human nature, but of that nature acting in oneness with a divine. From their point of view it is inevitable that every merely human portrait of Jesus that reflects with any fidelity the gospel features should be a failure; but when these

gospel features themselves, as by Renan, are excluded, the portrait on its human side becomes still more distorted and unnatural. Renan could not have succeeded with a human Jesus, who was nothing more, had he been a Shakspeare; as it is, the result is at the opposite pole to every conception of congruity and reality. The intellectual attributes of the Saviour entirely annul each other. He was deeply read in the Old Testament, and acquainted with the monarchies of Daniel; but all that he knew of the living Cæsar was the name.[1] His normal state was in the supernatural;[2] yet he created the parables, and had "an exquisite sentiment of nature."[3] He was so ignorant of civil government that it seemed a pure abuse;[4] but "his admirable good sense" guided him to the maxim, "Render unto Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's, and to God the things that are God's."[5] He was so devoid of political economy that he based his church on communism; and yet, "with rare sureness of discernment, he laid the foundation of a church destined to endure."[6] This ignorant even divined the fall of the Herodian temple,[7] though Renan elsewhere says that the prediction was written after the event.[8]

'Still more self-repugnant are the moral features

[1] P. 38. [2] P. 41. [3] P. 90. [4] P. 127.
[5] P. 122. [6] P. 290. [7] P. 211. [8] P. 273. Note.

which Renan unites in a picture of Jesus as new as it is likely to remain singular. According to him, on the one hand, "there is condensed in Jesus all that is good and elevated in our nature."[1] He is the author of that "eternal morality which has saved humanity."[2] "Jesus is the individual who has made his species take the greatest step towards the divine."[3] "He remains for humanity an inexhaustible principle of moral revivals."[4] What, then, are the actions frankly ascribed to this "universal reformer,"[5] this hero of the Sermon on the Mount, whose "delicate tact" recoiled from the hypocrisy of the Pharisees,[6] who always "addressed himself to the refinement of moral sentiment in his auditors,"[7] and who has "created the heaven of pure souls, where we find that which we seek in vain on earth, the perfect nobleness of the child of God, the absolute purity, the total abstraction from the pollutions of the world?"[8] According to Renan, on the other hand, he advanced, without any evidence, a claim to be the Messiah, and supported that claim by unfounded prophecies and unreal miracles, — "acts which would now be considered traits of illusion or of folly."[9] Though he knew that he was not the son of David, he was pleased with the children "giving him titles which he durst not assume him-

[1] P. 458. [2] P. 283. [3] P. 457. [4] P. 451. [5] P. 118.
[6] P. 332. [7] P. 333. [8] P. 445. [9] P. 267.

self; and when asked if he heard them, evasively replied that the praise of infant lips is the most agreeable to God."[1] It is not certain but that he connived at the false genealogies which traced his pedigree to David;[2] and in assuming this title, "as in many other circumstances of his life, Jesus adapted himself to current ideas, though they were not precisely his own."[3] "He felt the need of giving himself credit;"[4] and it is hinted that when his miraculous powers were sought to be tested by Herod, "with his ordinary tact he refused."[5] Not so, however, when the family of Bethany strove to overwhelm the incredulity of Jerusalem with the pretended miracle of the resurrection of Lazarus, inducing the yet living brother to hide himself in the tomb, for there Jesus lent himself more or less to the imposture: "His conscience," as Renan says, "having lost [in Jerusalem], by the fault of men, and not his own, something of its original limpidity."[6] It is vain to plead sincerity in such a course of deception, or to appeal to Oriental standards of honour as different from Occidental, in the case of one who is vaunted as the moral teacher and example of humanity. So little has Renan the sense of moral congruity, that he actually charges Jesus with accusing Judas of treachery at the supper-table,

[1] P. 192. [2] P. 239. [3] P. 239.
[4] P. 251. [5] P. 322. [6] Pp. 359, 360.

not from knowledge, but from mere suspicion, even as before he had described him as resenting the complaint of the waste of ointment through self-esteem.[1] A more hopeless chaos than the character of Renan's imaginary Christ no artist ever mistook for a creation, and the eulogies heaped by him on this abortion are as offensive to literary taste as they are to moral feeling. It is not too strong language to say that the true Christ of the Gospels would have had no other word for a character such as Renan has drawn, save "Repent!" that he would have renewed against him the thunders that smote the Pharisees, and driven him from his holy presence as a worker of iniquity!'[2]

[1] P. 385.

[2] *False Christs and the True*, by John Cairns, D.D., pp. 18–20.

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